

DGuzik 44 Acts

David Guzik

Book 44 of Bible Commentary:
David Guzik



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(Act 1:1)

Jesus Ascends to Heaven

I wrote¹ the former² account,³ Theophilus,⁴ about all that Jesus began to do and teach

(Guzik)

Act 1:1-26

Acts 1 - JESUS ASCENDS TO HEAVEN, A NEW APOSTLE CHOSEN

A. Prologue.

1. (Act_1:1) Reference to former writings.

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.

a. The **former account** is the Gospel of Luke. At one time the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were joined together as one book with two “volumes.”

i. Imagine what it would be like if the Book of Acts were missing. You would pick up your Bible and see the ministry of Jesus ending in the Gospel of John; next you would read about a guy named Paul writing to followers of Jesus in Rome. Who was Paul? How did the gospel get from Jerusalem to Rome? The Book of Acts answers these questions. “A great New Testament scholar has said that the title of *Acts* might be, ‘How they brought the Good News from Jerusalem to Rome.’” (Barclay)

ii. Acts is written in the literary style of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint.

“Since Luke can write in a different style (Luk_1:1-4), this is something deliberate. Probably he regarded himself as recording *sacred history*.” (Marshall)

iii. We really don't know all that much about Luke from the New Testament. We know that he was a doctor, we know that he was a Gentile, and we know that he was a companion of Paul.

iv. There was a time when many scholars thought that Acts was sort of a romance novel of the early church, written at least 100 years after the events supposedly happened. But William Ramsay, a noted archaeologist and Bible scholar, proved that the historical record of Acts is remarkably accurate regarding the specific practices, laws and customs of the period it claims to record. It is definitely the work of contemporary eyewitnesses.

v. In the mid-1960's, A.N. Sherwin-White, an expert in Graeco-Roman history from Oxford, wrote about Acts: "The historical framework is exact. In terms of time and place the details are precise and correct . . . As documents these narratives belong to the same historical series as the record of provincial and imperial trials in epigraphical and literary sources of the first and early second centuries AD . . . For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming . . . Any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd.

Roman historians have long taken it for granted."

vi. John Calvin wrote that the Book of Acts was "a kind of vast treasure." D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones called Acts "that most lyrical of books . . . Live in that book, I exhort you: It is a tonic, the greatest tonic I know of in the realm of the Spirit." (Cited in Stott)

b. **Theophilus** might have been a Christian wanting instruction. He might have been a Roman official being briefed by Luke about the history of the Christian movement; or the name could be symbolic, because the name **Theophilus** means "God-lover."

i. In the introduction to the first volume (Luk_1:3), Luke addresses Theophilus with title *most excellent*, which was a way to address people who held high office.

ii. Since Acts ends with Paul awaiting trial before Caesar, some have wondered if Luke-Acts are not “defense briefs” on Paul’s behalf to give a Roman official background on Paul’s case. Luke arrived in Jerusalem with Paul in Act_21:17; he left with him again on the journey to Rome in Act_27:1. In those two years, Luke had plenty of time to research and write his gospel and the Book of Acts.

iii. Luke wanted to show Rome that Christianity was *harmless* (some Romans officials had embraced it themselves), *innocent* (Roman judges could find no basis for prosecution) and *lawful* (as the true fulfillment of Judaism, an approved religion in the Roman Empire).

c. Notice that **the former account** concerned **all that Jesus began both to do and teach**. Luke’s Gospel describes only the beginning of Jesus’ work; Acts describes its continuation; and the work of Jesus continues to our present day.

i. We must remember that Acts does not give us a full history of the church during this period. For example, the churches in Galilee and Samaria are barely mentioned (Act_9:31), and the establishing of a strong church in Egypt during this time isn’t mentioned at all.

ii. Acts takes us up to about 60 or 61 A.D., with Paul in Rome waiting to appear before Caesar Nero. This same Nero began his infamous persecutions of Christians in 64 A.D.

2. (Act_1:2-3) The last work of Jesus before His ascension to heaven.

Until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

a. Jesus, **through the Holy Spirit**, instructed the apostles regarding what to do in His absence.

b. Jesus also established the fact of His resurrection with **many infallible proofs** during the **forty days** after his resurrection but before His ascension.

i. In 1Co_15:6, Paul describes one of these **many infallible proofs**: *He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present.* There were more than five hundred people who had seen the resurrected Jesus, and most of them were alive some twenty-five years later in the days of Paul!

c. The teaching Jesus gave during that period is not recorded, but we are told that He used that time to speak **of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.**

i. Many Gnostic and New Age teachers would like to think that after His resurrection, Jesus used the forty days to teach His followers strange and obscure doctrines that must be “rediscovered” with new revelations today. But Luke reminds us that Jesus simply taught them much the same material that He had taught them in His earthly ministry: **The things pertaining to the kingdom of God.**

B. The ascension of Jesus.

1. (Act_1:4-5) Jesus’ final instructions to the disciples.

And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” *He said*, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

a. **He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem:** Jesus has nothing else for the disciples to do other than to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. He knows that they really can do nothing effective for the Kingdom of God until the Spirit comes.

b. These verses provide another of the many “Trinity in Miniature” examples. **Jesus** tells of the **Promise of the Father**, which is the coming of the **Holy Spirit.**

c. **You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit:** The idea of being **baptized** is to be immersed or covered over in

something; even as John baptized people in water, so these disciples would be “immersed” in the Holy Spirit.

i. Perhaps it is more useful to describe the baptism of the Holy Spirit more like a *condition* than an *experience*. We should perhaps ask, “*are you* baptized in the Holy Spirit?” instead of asking, “*have you been* baptized in the Holy Spirit?”

2. (Act_1:6) The disciples ask Jesus a final question before His ascension.

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

a. **Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?** This was a question asked many times before. They must have believed that Jesus would certainly establish an earthly political kingdom before ascending to the Father. Of course, when Jesus ascended into heaven, He would leave them in charge of the kingdom!

i. “The verb *restore* shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun *Israel* that they were expecting a national kingdom; and the adverbial clause *at this time* that they were expecting its immediate establishment.” (Stott)

ii. “Marvelous is their rudeness, that when as they had been diligently instructed by the space of three whole years, they betray no less ignorance than if they had heard never a word. There are as many errors in this question as words.” (Calvin)

b. The disciples certainly knew the many Old Testament prophecies describing the spiritual *and* political rebirth of Israel.

The disciples probably thought that the spiritual rebirth seemed certain, so the political would come, also.

3. (Act_1:7-8) Jesus’ final teaching and final promise before His ascension.

And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

a. **It is not for you to know:** Jesus warned the disciples against inquiring into aspects of the timing of God’s kingdom, because those things belong to God the Father alone (**which the Father has put in His own authority**).

i. It was wise for Jesus not to outline His plan over the next 2,000 years. How do you think the disciples would have felt if they had known that the kingdom they wanted to see right then would not be coming for almost 2,000 years?

ii. At the same time, Jesus did not say that there was to be *no* restoration of the kingdom to Israel; He simply said that speculation into the times and dates of it was not proper for the disciples.

b. **But you shall receive power:** If the political kingdom they wanted would be delayed, **power** would not. They would shortly receive power with the coming of the **Holy Spirit**.

i. The disciples were still seeing **power**, too much in terms of Caesar, and not enough in terms of Christ. Jesus offers them real power, spiritual power, but how attractive did that seem? They were thinking of political power!

c. The natural result of receiving that power would be that they would become **witnesses** of Jesus, all over the earth.

i. Notice that this really isn’t a command; it is a simple statement of fact: **When the Holy Spirit has come upon you . . . you shall be witnesses of Me**. The words **shall be** are in the indicative, not the imperative.

Jesus wasn’t recommending that they become **witnesses**, He was saying they would be **witnesses**.

ii. If we want to be **witnesses**, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit! Far more important than the best course in

evangelism is the filling of the Holy Spirit!

iii. Isa_43:10 has the Lord proclaiming to His people *You are My witnesses*. A cultic group today claims that this is their mandate for being “Jehovah’s Witnesses.” Unfortunately, they fail to see Isa_43:10 in the context of Act_1:8; we are truly *Yahweh’s Witnesses* when we are *Jesus’ Witnesses*.

d. The progress of the spread of the Gospel from **Jerusalem**, to **Judea and Samaria**, and then **to the end of the earth** becomes the outline of Acts. Acts chapters 1 through 7 describe the gospel in **Jerusalem**, chapters 8 through 12 speak of the gospel in **Judea and Samaria**, and chapters 13 through 28 tell of the gospel going **to the end of the earth**.

i. We might imagine the objections to the places of ministry Jesus described. **Jerusalem** was where Jesus was executed at the word of an angry mob; **Judea** rejected His ministry; **Samaria** was regarded as a wasteland of impure half-breeds; and in the **uttermost parts of the earth**, the Gentiles were seen as nothing better than fuel for the fires of Hell. Yet God wanted a witness sent to all of these places.

4. (Act_1:9-11) Jesus ascends into heaven.

Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

a. Jesus was taken up from them, as He was blessing them (Luk_24:50). As He slowly disappeared into the sky, surrounded by a **cloud** (of Shekinah glory?), they continued to gaze upward.

b. Why did Jesus ascend this way? He certainly could have simply “vanished” to the Father’s presence in a secret sort of way. But with the ascension, Jesus wanted His followers to

know that He was gone for good, as opposed to the way He appeared and reappeared during the forty days after the resurrection.

i. Remember Jesus' words to His disciples in Joh_16:7 : *It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.* Now the disciples could know that that promise would be fulfilled.

c. **Why do you stand gazing up into heaven?** The **two men** (apparently angels) told the disciples to put their attention in the right place (obedience to Jesus' command to return to Jerusalem), not in wondering where and how Jesus went. Jesus told them to go to the ends of the *earth*, and they stood **gazing up into heaven**.

i. Morgan speculates that the "men" were possibly Moses and Elijah. It seems best to say they were angels.

d. **Will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven:** Jesus will return just as He left: *physically, visibly*, and to the *Mount of Olives*.

C. Matthias is appointed to replace Judas.

1. (Act_1:12-14) The followers of Jesus return to Jerusalem.

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

a. **A Sabbath's day journey** describes a short distance, the only kind allowed on the Sabbath.

b. Who was there? The eleven disciples (the twelve minus Judas) are present; along with Mary, the mother of Jesus, the brothers of Jesus (such as James and Jude), the women who followed Jesus, and others, adding up to about 120

(Act_1:15).

i. The brothers of Jesus never seemed to be supportive of His ministry before His death and resurrection (Joh_7:5, Mar_3:21), but now that has changed - the power of the resurrected Jesus is already on display.

ii. Calvin translates **with the women** as *with their wives*, a reference to the wives of the apostles.

c. Their *obedience* is notable: **They returned to Jerusalem**. Jesus told them to return to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and that is exactly what they did. They didn't forget the sermon right after they heard it, and they actually did what Jesus told them to do, even though He was no longer physically present with them.

d. Their *unity* is notable: **These all continued with one accord**. When we saw the disciples in the gospels, it seemed that they were always fighting and bickering. What had changed? Peter still had the history of denying the Lord; Matthew was still a tax collector; Simon was still a zealot. Their differences were still there, but the resurrected Jesus in their hearts was greater than any difference.

e. Their *prayer* is notable; they **all** prayed, and they **continued** in **prayer and supplication**. The idea of supplication is a sense of desperation and earnestness in prayer.

f. Already, we see three important steps in making godly decisions: The disciples are in obedience, they are in fellowship, and they are in prayer.

2. (Act_1:15-20) Peter suggests selecting a replacement for Judas.

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, "Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry." (Now this man

purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) “For it is written in the book of Psalms: ‘Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it’; and, ‘Let another take his office.’”

a. **Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples:** Here, Peter takes a natural leadership role among the disciples.

There is nothing wrong with seeing Peter as the leader of the first group of the apostles, even as he often was the spokesman among the disciples during the earthly ministry of Jesus.

i. However, the idea that the authority of Peter was supreme, and that he handed it down in unbroken succession, is unbiblical and wrong.

b. Peter’s words show a wisdom we did not often see in him before; he begins by noting that Judas didn’t spoil God’s plan, he fulfilled it (**this Scripture had to be fulfilled**). This is something that only the wise and mature can see when evil happens.

c. Luke’s historical note calls attention to how Judas died. Mat_27:5 says that Judas hanged himself, but apparently he failed in the attempt, fell, and was killed by the impact of falling from the tree in the **Field of Blood**.

i. It was a **Field of Blood** not only because Judas spilled his blood there, but also because the field was purchased with the “blood money” given to the betrayer of Jesus.

d. **For it is written:** Peter, quoting from two separate Psalms, shows why God would have them choose another disciple to “officially” replace Judas.

i. Their reliance on *God’s Word* is notable; this wasn’t the wisdom of man at work, but a principle revealed in Scripture. Also, this is the first time in the New Testament we read that Peter quoted Scripture!

ii. **Let his habitation be desolate:** David, the writer of these quoted Psalms, knew what it was like to be betrayed by another. When he was a fugitive from Saul, he was betrayed by a man named Doeg (1 Samuel 21-22), and many innocent people died as a result. David may have penned these very words in reference to this betrayer.

iii. **Let another take his office:** When David was betrayed, he desired that the betrayer would be desolate and that another fill the betrayer's office. It wasn't hard to understand that the Son of David - Jesus, whom David often pictured - would desire the same thing.

iv. Their *desire for God's will* is notable; because of the principle of the quoted Scripture, they will replace Judas because they believe it is what Jesus wants, not because it is what they want.

3. (Act_1:21-23) Qualifications are stated and two men are nominated.

"Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

a. **One of these must become a witness with us:** The disciples were bold enough to make a decision because they knew from God's Word that this is what He wanted. The apostles did not sense an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them; that was yet to come. But God did not leave them without guidance. They knew what to do from the Word. Even when we don't "feel" the Holy Spirit, we still have God's voice permanently established in His Word.

i. When we don't feel a special blessing from the Holy Spirit in an area not revealed by God's Word, we still know what to do: Obey God's Word.

b. **Who have accompanied us all the time:** Whoever replaces Judas must be one who had been with them since

they were baptized by John, stayed with them during the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, and they must have seen the resurrected Jesus.

i. What told them that these were to be the qualifications? Sanctified common sense! There was no direct, awesome revelation from God; their common sense was being blessed because they were in obedience, in fellowship, in prayer, in the Word, and desiring God's will.

ii. Their *sanctified common sense* was notable; it didn't answer everything, but it did narrow it down to two men.

c. The main job of the new apostle was simply to **become a witness with us of His resurrection**. We can do the same job by showing that Jesus lives in our lives.

4. (Act_1:24-26) The disciples pray and cast lots to select a replacement for Judas.

And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

a. **And they prayed:** They prayed first, and it was easy to pray because they had already been praying (Act_1:14).

i. Their *doing what Jesus would do* was notable. How did Jesus choose the disciples? He prayed (Luk_6:12-13), even as these disciples did, to see who the Lord would add to their number.

b. **And they cast their lots:** Many people have questioned the method for choosing one of the two men - after all these great spiritual steps, they end up rolling dice to pick the winner. Is this any way to choose an apostle?

i. Their *reliance on God is notable*. Though they were not yet filled with the Holy Spirit, as they would be, they still wanted to choose a method that would make them rely on God. *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.* (Pro_16:33)

ii. The casting of lots may be an imperfect way to discern God's will, but it is much better than the methods many Christians use today, relying on emotions, circumstances, feelings, carnal desires and so forth.

c. **And the lot fell on Matthias:** Was Matthias the right man for the job of the twelfth apostle?

i. Some insist that Matthias was the wrong choice and the use of lots was not right. The idea is that God would have chosen Paul if the office had been left vacant. But we must respect the testimony of the Scriptures; God did not want to leave the office vacant. If He did, it might be seen as a victory for Satan - Jesus picked 12, but one came up short and defeated Jesus' desire to have 12 apostles.

ii. Even though we read nothing more of Matthias, we should not assume he was a "dud" as an apostle; except for Peter and John, none of the original twelve are mentioned again after Acts 1. Matthias was no more of a "dud" than Matthew or Andrew or Thomas or any of the others.

iii. Paul considered himself an apostle, but *one born out of due time* (1Co_15:8). It doesn't seem that he objected to the selection of Matthias.

iv. Rev_21:14 tells us that each of the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem has the name of one of the *twelve apostles of the Lamb*. Is the twelfth apostle Paul or Matthias? Who can say for certain?

d. No one can fault all the things they did before they cast lots. We must believe that all these things put them into the place where God would truly guide their decision. If we would put ourselves into the same place, we wouldn't make many wrong decisions!

i. How many wrong decisions would we make if we did all of these things before the decision? The disciples were in obedience, they were in fellowship, they were in prayer, they were in the Word, they wanted to do God's will, they used sanctified common sense, they did what Jesus would do, and they did what they could do to rely on God.

(Act 1:2) until the day he was taken up to heaven,⁵ after he had given orders⁶ by⁷ the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

(Act 1:3) To the same apostles⁸ also, after his suffering,⁹ he presented himself alive with many convincing proofs. He was seen by them over a forty-day period¹⁰ and spoke about matters concerning the kingdom of God.

(Act 1:4) While he was with them,¹¹ he declared,¹² "Do not leave Jerusalem,¹³ but wait there¹⁴ for what my¹⁵ Father promised,¹⁶ which you heard about from me.¹⁷

(Act 1:5) For¹⁸ John baptized with water, but you¹⁹ will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

(Act 1:6) So when they had gathered together, they began to ask him,²⁰ "Lord, is this the time when you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

(Act 1:7) He told them, "You are not permitted to know²¹ the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.

(Act 1:8) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts²² of the earth."

(Act 1:9) After²³ he had said this, while they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud hid him from their sight.

(Act 1:10) As²⁴ they were still staring into the sky while he was going, suddenly²⁵ two men in white clothing stood near them (Act 1:11) and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here²⁶ looking up into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven²⁷ will come back in the same way you saw him go into heaven."

(Act 1:12) ***A Replacement for Judas is Chosen***

Then they returned to Jerusalem²⁸ from the mountain²⁹ called the Mount of Olives³⁰ (which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey³¹ away).

(Act 1:13) When³² they had entered Jerusalem,³³ they went to the upstairs room where they were staying. Peter³⁴

and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James were there.³⁵

(Act 1:14) All these continued together in prayer with one mind, together with the women, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.³⁶

(Act 1:15) In those days³⁷ Peter stood up among the believers³⁸ (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty people) and said, (Act 1:16) "Brothers,³⁹ the scripture had to be fulfilled that the Holy Spirit foretold through⁴⁰ David concerning Judas — who became the guide for those who arrested Jesus — (Act 1:17) for he was counted as one of us and received a share in this ministry."⁴¹

(Act 1:18) (Now this man Judas⁴² acquired a field with the reward of his unjust deed,⁴³ and falling headfirst⁴⁴ he burst open in the middle and all his intestines⁴⁵ gushed out.

(Act 1:19) This⁴⁶ became known to all who lived in Jerusalem, so that in their own language⁴⁷ they called that field⁴⁸ *Hakeldama*, that is, "Field of Blood.") (Act 1:20) "For it is written in the book of Psalms, ' **Let his house become deserted,** ⁴⁹ **and let there be no one to live in it,'⁵⁰**

and ' **Let another take his position of responsibility.'**⁵¹

(Act 1:21) Thus one of the men⁵² who have accompanied us during all the time the Lord Jesus associated with⁵³ us, (Act 1:22) beginning from his baptism by John until the day he⁵⁴ was taken up from us — one of these must become a witness of his resurrection together with us."

(Act 1:23) So they⁵⁵ proposed two candidates:⁵⁶ Joseph called Barsabbas (also called Justus) and Matthias.

(Act 1:24) Then they prayed,⁵⁷ "Lord, you know the hearts of all. Show us which one of these two you have chosen (Act 1:25) to assume the task⁵⁸ of this service⁵⁹ and apostleship from which Judas turned aside⁶⁰ to go to his own place."⁶¹

(Act 1:26) Then⁶² they cast lots for them, and the one chosen was Matthias;⁶³ so he was counted with the eleven

apostles.64

(Act 2:1) ***The Holy Spirit and the Day of Pentecost***

Now¹ when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

(Guzik)

Act 2:1-47

Acts 2 - THE HOLY SPIRIT IS POURED OUT ON THE CHURCH

A. The initial experience of the filling of the Holy Spirit.

1. (Act_2:1-4 a) The disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit.

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

a. **The Day of Pentecost** was a Jewish feast held fifty days after Passover. It was a time to celebrate the firstfruits of the harvest.

i. At Passover, the first sheaf reaped from the barley harvest was presented to God. But at Pentecost, the firstfruits of the wheat harvest were given to God; therefore, Pentecost is called *the day of firstfruits* (Num_28:26).

ii. Also, Jewish tradition taught that **Pentecost** commemorated the day when the Law was given to Israel. The Jews sometimes called **Pentecost** *shimchath torah*, or "Joy of the Law."

iii. So on the Old Testament **Day of Pentecost**, Israel received the Law, and on the New Testament **Day of Pentecost**, the Church received the Spirit of Grace in fullness.

b. Notice that the followers of Jesus were **all with one accord in one place**. They were gathered together sharing

the same heart, the same love for God, the same trust in His promise, and the same geography.

i. Before we can be filled, we must recognize our emptiness; by gathering together for prayer, in obedience, these disciples were doing just that. They recognized they did not have the resources in themselves to do what they could or should, they had to rely on the work of God.

c. The association of the sound of a **rushing mighty wind**, filling the **whole house**, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is unusual. But it probably has connection with the fact that in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, the word for *spirit* (as in *Holy Spirit*) is the same word for *breath* or **wind**. Here, the **sound from heaven** is the sound of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the disciples d. The **divided tongues, as of fire**, appearing over each one are also unusual. It probably should be connected with John the Baptist's prophecy that Jesus would *baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire* (Mat_3:11).

i. The idea behind the picture of **fire** is usually purification, as a refiner uses fire to make pure gold. Or fire can burn away what is temporary, leaving what will last. This is an excellent illustration of the principle that the filling of the Holy Spirit is not just for abstract power, but for *purity*.

ii. In certain places in the Old Testament, God showed His special pleasure with a sacrifice by kindling the fire for it Himself. Fire from heaven came down and consumed the sacrifice. The experience of the followers of Jesus on Pentecost is another example of God sending fire from heaven to show His pleasure and power, but this time, it descended upon *living sacrifices* (Rom_12:1).

iii. Under the Old Covenant, the Holy Spirit rested on God's people more as a *nation*, that is, Israel. But under the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit rests upon God's people as *individuals* - the tongues of fire **sat upon each of them**.

iv. "The Church can be repaired by no other means, saving only by the giving of the Holy Spirit." (Calvin) e. Essentially,

the **rushing mighty wind** and the **tongues, as of fire**, were only unusual, temporary phenomenon, which accompanied the true gift: **And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.**

i. While it would be wrong to expect a **rushing mighty wind** or **tongues, as of fire**, to be present today when the Holy Spirit is poured out, we can experience the true gift. We, just as they, can be **all filled with the Holy Spirit.**

ii. But we should do what the disciples did before and during their filling with the Holy Spirit. The disciples were filled *in fulfillment of a promise*. They were filled as they *received in faith*. They were filled *in God's timing*. They were filled *as they were together in unity*. And they were filled *in unusual ways*.

2. (Act_2:4-13) The phenomenon of speaking in tongues.

And began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how *is it that* we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs; we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?" Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine."

a. **And began to speak with other tongues:** In response to the filling of the Holy Spirit, those present (not only the twelve apostles) **began to speak with other tongues**. These were languages that they were never taught, and

they spoke these languages this **as the Spirit gave them utterance.**

b. **Devout men, from every nation under heaven:** The multitude from many nations gathered in Jerusalem because of the Feast of Pentecost. Many of these were the same people who gathered in Jerusalem at the last feast, Passover, when an angry mob demanded the execution of Jesus.

c. A crowd quickly gathered, being attracted by **this sound**, which was either the sound of the *rushing mighty wind* or the sound of speaking in **other tongues**. When the crowd came, they heard the Christians speaking in their own foreign languages. Apparently, the Christians could be heard from the windows of the upper room, or they went out onto some kind of balcony or into the temple courts.

i. Not many homes of that day could hold 120 people. It is far more likely that this upper room was part of the temple courts, which was a huge structure, with porches and colonnades and rooms. The crowd would come from people milling about the temple courts.

d. The crowd heard the Christians **speaking . . . the wonderful works of God. All were amazed and perplexed**, but **some** used it as a means of honest inquiry, asking, **"Whatever could this mean? "** **Others** used it as an excuse to dismiss the work of God, saying, **"They are full of new wine."**

i. **Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? Galileans** were known as uncultured and poor speakers.

This was all the more reason to be impressed with their ability to speak eloquently in other languages. "Galileans had difficulty pronouncing gutturals and had the habit of swallowing syllables when speaking; so they were looked down upon by the people of Jerusalem as being provincial." (Longenecker)

ii. They all spoke in different tongues, yet there was a unity among the believers. "Ever since the early church fathers, commentators have seen the blessing of Pentecost as a

deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel.” (Stott)

3. **Whatever *could* this mean?** What are we to make of the phenomenon of speaking in tongues?

a. Speaking in tongues has been the focal point for significant controversy in the church. People still ask the same question these bystanders asked on the day of Pentecost.

b. There is no controversy that God, at least at one time, gave the church the gift of tongues. But much of the controversy centers on the question, “what is God’s *purpose* for the gift of tongues?”

i. Some think that the gift of tongues was given primarily as a sign to unbelievers (1Co_14:21-22) and as a means to miraculously communicate the gospel in diverse languages. They believe there is no longer the need for this sign, so they regard tongues as a gift no longer present in the church today.

ii. Others argue that the gift of tongues, while a sign to unbelievers as stated by 1Co_14:21-22, are *primarily* a gift of communication between the believer and God (1Co_14:2; 1Co_14:13-15), and is a gift still given by God today.

c. Many mistakenly interpret this incident in Acts 2, assuming that the disciples used tongues to preach to the gathered crowd. But a careful look shows this idea is wrong.

i. Notice what the people heard the disciples say: **Speaking . . . the wonderful works of God**. The disciples declared the praises of God, thanking Him with all their might in unknown tongues. The gathered crowd merely *overheard* what the disciples exuberantly declared to God.

ii. The idea that these disciples communicated to the diverse crowd in tongues is plainly wrong. The crowd *had* a common language (Greek), and Peter preached a sermon to them in that language! (Act_2:14-40)

d. The gift of tongues *is* a personal language of prayer given by God, whereby the believer communicates with God

beyond the limits of knowledge and understanding (1Co_14:14-15).

i. Tongues has an important place in the devotional life of the believer, but a small place in the corporate life of the church (1Co_14:18-19), especially in “public” meetings (1Co_14:23).

ii. When tongues *are* practiced in the corporate life of the church, it must be carefully controlled, and never without an interpretation given by the Holy Spirit (1Co_14:27-28).

iii. The ability to pray in an unknown tongue is not a gift given to every believer (1Co_12:20).

iv. The ability to pray in an unknown tongue is *not* the evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis leads many to seek the gift of tongues (and to counterfeit it) merely to prove to themselves and others that they really are filled with the Holy Spirit.

4. Is the speaking **with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance** in Acts 2 the same *gift of tongues* described in 1

Corinthians 12, 14?

a. Some say we are dealing with two separate gifts. They argue that the 1 Corinthians gift must be regulated and restricted, while the Acts 2 gift can be used any time without regulation. Those who believe they are two separate gifts emphasize that the speech of Acts 2 was immediately recognized by foreign visitors to Jerusalem, while the speech of 1 Corinthians was unintelligible to those present except with a divinely granted gift of interpretation.

b. However, this doesn't take into account that the differences have more to do with the *circumstances* in which the gifts were exercised than with the gifts *themselves*.

c. In Jerusalem, the group spoken to was uniquely multi-national and multi-lingual; at feast time (Pentecost), Jews of the dispersion from all over the world were in the city. Therefore, the likelihood that foreign ears would hear a tongue spoken in their language was much greater. On the

other hand, in Corinth (though a rather cosmopolitan city itself), the gift was exercised in a local church, with members all sharing a common language (Greek). If one had the same diversity of foreigners visiting the Corinthian church when all were speaking in tongues, it is likely that many would hear members of the Corinthian church **speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.**

d. As well, it should never be assumed that each person among the 120 who spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost spoke in a language immediately intelligible to human ears present that day. We read they *all . . . began to speak with other tongues*; therefore there were more than 120 individuals speaking in tongues. Since the nations spoken of in Act_2:9-11 number only fifteen (with perhaps others present but not mentioned), it is likely that many (if not most) of the 120 spoke praises to God in a language that was not understood by someone immediately present. The text simply does not indicate that someone present could understand *each person* speaking in tongues.

e. However, we should not assume those who were not immediately understood by human ears spoke “gibberish,” as the modern gift of tongues is called with derision. They may have praised God in a language completely unknown, yet completely human. After all, what would the language of the Aztecs sound like to Roman ears? Or some may have spoke in a completely unique language given by God and understood by Him and Him alone. After all, communication with God, not man, is the purpose of the gift of tongues (1Co_14:2). The repetition of simple phrases, unintelligible and perhaps nonsensical to human bystanders, does not mean someone speaks “gibberish.” Praise to God may be simple and repetitive, and part of the whole dynamic of tongues is that it bypasses the understanding of the speaker (1Co_14:14), being understood by God and God alone.

f. All in all, we should regard the gift of Acts 2 and the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians as the same, simply because the same term is used for both in the original language (*heterais glossais*). Also, the verb translated *gave them utterance* in Act_2:4

is frequently used in Greek literature in connection with spiritually prompted (ecstatic) speech, not mere translation into other languages.

B. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost.

1. (Act_2:14-15) Peter begins his sermon.

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is *only* the third hour of the day."

a. **Peter, standing up with the eleven:** Peter stands and preaches to the crowd as a representative of the whole group of apostles.

i. We should notice that the speaking in tongues stopped when Peter began to preach. The Holy Spirit now worked through Peter's preaching and would not work *against* Himself through tongues at the same time.

b. **Raised his voice:** There is a remarkable change in Peter. He has courage and boldness that is a complete contrast to his denials of Jesus before being filled with the Holy Spirit.

i. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter didn't teach as the rabbis in his day usually did. They would gather disciples around them, sit down, and instruct them and any others who might listen. Instead, Peter proclaimed the truth like a herald.

c. **For these are not drunk:** Peter deflects the mocking criticism that the disciples were drunk. In that day, it was unthinkable that people would be so drunk so early in the day (about 9:00 in the morning).

i. Commentator Adam Clarke says that most Jews - pious or not - did not eat or drink until after the **third hour of the**

day, because that was the time for prayer, and they would only eat after their business with God was accomplished.

d. **These are not drunk:** We shouldn't think that the Christians were acting as if they were drunk. The idea of "being drunk in the Spirit" has no foundation in Scripture; the comment from the mockers had no basis in reality.

i. "Nor, must we add, did the believers' experience of the Spirit's fullness *seem* to them or *look* to others like intoxication, because they had lost control of their normal mental and physical functions. No, the fruit of the Spirit is 'self-control,' not the loss of it." (Stott)

2. (Act_2:16-21) Peter quotes the prophet Joel.

"But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass *that* whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'"

a. **But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:** In the midst of this great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, among signs and wonders and speaking in tongues, what did Peter do? Essentially, he said, "Let's have a Bible study! Let's study what **the prophet Joel** said!"

i. This focus on God's Word did not quench the moving of the Holy Spirit; it fulfilled what the Holy Spirit wanted to do. All the signs and wonders and speaking in tongues were preparing for this work of God's Word.

ii. Unfortunately, some people set the Word against the Spirit. They almost think it's more spiritual if there is no

Bible study. Sadly, this is often due to the weak and unspiritual teaching of those who teach the Bible!

b. **The prophet Joel:** This quotation from Joel 2:28-32 focuses on God's promise to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. What happened on the day of Pentecost was a *near* fulfillment of that promise, with the *final* fulfillment coming in the last days (which Peter had good reason to believe he was in).

c. The idea of the **last days** is that they are the times of the Messiah, encompassing both His humble coming and His return in glory. Because Jesus had already come in humility, they were aware that His return in glory could be any time.

i. Though there were still to be some 2,000 years until Jesus returned, until this point, history had been running *towards* the point of the ultimate establishment of God's kingdom on earth. But from this time on, history runs *parallel* to that point, ready at any time for the consummation.

ii. It may also be helpful to see the **last days** as something like a "season," a general period of time, more than a more specific *period*, such as a week. In the whole span of God's plan for human history, we are in the "season" of the **last days**.

d. **I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh:** In using the quotation from Joel, Peter explained what these curious onlookers saw - the Holy Spirit poured forth upon the people. Before, the Holy Spirit was given in drops, now He would be poured forth.

e. Peter also used the quotation to an evangelistic purpose. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit means that God is offering salvation in a way previously unknown: **Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved**. It will be many years until the gospel is offered to Gentiles, yet Peter's sermon text announces the gospel invitation by saying, **whoever**

calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.

i. The idea is expressed in Pro_18:10 : *The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.*

3. (Act_2:22-24) Peter introduces the focus of the sermon: The resurrected Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know; Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.”

a. Many people would think it enough for Peter to stop after the quotation from Joel - think of what we have in it! An outpouring of the Holy Spirit, miraculous dreams, visions, and prophecy, signs and wonders regarding the Day of the Lord, and an invitation to call on the name of the Lord. But it isn't enough, because Peter hasn't spoken about the saving work of Jesus on our behalf. Everything until now has been introduction; now comes the essential message.

b. Peter starts off with **hear these words** as he had said before, *let this be known to you, and heed my words* (Act_2:14).

Peter wanted people to pay attention, and he spoke as if he had something important to say - something many teachers fail to do.

c. **As you yourselves also know:** Peter refers to what these people already knew about Jesus. They already knew of His life and miraculous works. Often in speaking to people about Jesus, we should start with what they *already* know about Him.

d. Peter knows that Jesus' death was **by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God**. At the same time, those who rejected Him and called for His execution were responsible for the actions of their **lawless hands**.

i. Peter did not flinch at saying, “You crucified this Man who was sent by God.” His first concern was not to please his audience, but to tell them the truth. What a difference from the man who, a few months before, even knowing Jesus! (Mat_26:69-75)

e. Yet, **it was not possible** that Jesus should remain bound by death, as explained by Peter’s following quotation from Psalms 16. It was not possible that Jesus should remain a victim of the sin and hatred of man; He would certainly triumph over it.

i. **Having loosed the pains of death:** In the phrase **pains of death**, the word **pains** is actually the word for “birth pains.” In this sense, the *tomb* was a *womb* for Jesus!

ii. “It was not possible that the chosen one of God should remain in the grip of death; ‘the abyss can no more hold the Redeemer than a pregnant woman can hold the child in her body.’” (Bruce, quoting Bertram)

4. (Act_2:25-36) Peter develops the theme of the resurrected Jesus.

“For David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’ Men *and* brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father

the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool."' Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

a. **For David says concerning Him:** Peter tells us that Psa_16:8-11 is prophetic, with application to the Messiah. Jesus probably taught Peter this when He instructed the disciples in the Scriptures (Luk_24:44-45).

b. **Your Holy One:** Jesus bore the full wrath of God on the cross, *as if* He were a guilty sinner, guilty of *all* our sin, even being made sin for us (2Co_5:21). Yet, that work was an act of holy, giving love for us, so that Jesus Himself did not become a sinner, even though He bore the full *guilt* of our sin.

i. This is the gospel message! That Jesus took our punishment for sin on the cross and remained a perfect Savior through the whole ordeal - *proved* by His resurrection. Apart from the resurrection, we would have no *proof* that Jesus successfully, perfectly, paid for our sins.

c. **Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption:** Because Jesus bore our sin without becoming a sinner, He remained the **Holy One**, even in His death. Since it is incomprehensible that God's Holy One should be bound by death, the resurrection was absolutely inevitable.

i. Instead of being punished for His glorious work on the cross, Jesus was rewarded, as prophetically described in the Psalm: **You have made known to be the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.**

d. **David . . . is both dead and buried:** Peter points out that this Psalm cannot be speaking of its human author, David -

he is dead and remains buried. The Psalm must speak prophetically of the Messiah, Jesus.

e. **This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses:** Jesus of Nazareth, the man they all knew (*as you yourselves also know*, Act_2:22), was the one who fulfilled this prophetic Psalm. How did Peter know this? He saw the resurrected Jesus! The basic *evidence* of the resurrection was simply the report of reliable eyewitnesses: **Of which we are all witnesses.**

f. **He poured out this which you now see and hear:** Peter affirms that what is going on is the work of the risen and ascended Jesus, who has sent His Holy Spirit upon His church.

g. **Therefore let all the house of Israel know:** The sermon concludes with a summary. Simply, all Israel should know that even though they crucified Jesus, God has declared Him **both Lord and Christ.**

i. It is as if Peter said, "You were all wrong about Jesus. You crucified Him as if He were a criminal, but by the resurrection, God proved that He is Lord and Messiah."

ii. When Peter exhorted them *whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved* (Act_2:21), there is little doubt who the **Lord** is that he spoke of: **Jesus.**

iii. "That the early Christians meant to give Jesus the title *Lord* in this highest sense of all is indicated by their not hesitating on occasion to apply to him passages of Old Testament scripture referring to Yahweh." (Bruce) C. The response to Peter's preaching.

1. (Act_2:37) They respond with a question: **What shall we do?**

Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?"

a. It is fascinating to see what an incredible work of the Holy Spirit happened here. Peter offered absolutely no invitation, merely a declaration of truth, but the listeners themselves gave the invitation!

i. The exercise of the gift of tongues produced nothing in the listeners but astonishment and mocking; it wasn't until the gospel was preached that conviction from the Holy Spirit came. This was the work God really wanted to accomplish.

b. **Cut to the heart** is a good way of describing the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They now knew that they were responsible for the death of Jesus (as each of us are), and that they had to do something about it.

i. Peter had a little experience with cutting before; when Jesus was arrested, he cut off the right ear of one of the men who came to arrest Jesus (Joh_18:10). All this was an embarrassing mess that Jesus had to clean up - this was Peter in the flesh, doing the best *he* could with a literal sword of human power.

ii. When the resurrected Jesus changed Peter's life, and when the power of the Holy Spirit had come upon him, he did some effective cutting: Cutting hearts, opening them to Jesus. This is what Peter could do in the power of the Spirit, doing God's *best* with the sword of the Spirit, God's Word. Which sword was more powerful?

c. When God is working on someone's heart, they *want* to come to Him; they will act to come to Him. Perhaps that's why people are listening to this right now, because they want to come to God!

2. (Act_2:38-40) Peter invites the multitude to come to Jesus.

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

a. Peter must have been pleasantly astounded to see what God had done in this situation; instead of people wanting to

crucify him because of Jesus, thousands of people want to trust in Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

b. **Repent, and let every one of you be baptized:**

Responding to the question, "*What shall we do?*" Peter gave them something to *do*. This means that we must *do* something to be saved, we must *do* something to follow Jesus; it doesn't just "happen."

c. The first thing Peter told them to *do* is **repent**. To repent does not mean to feel sorry, but it means to change one's mind or direction - they had thought a certain way about Jesus before (considering Him worthy of crucifixion), now they must turn around their thinking, embracing Him as Lord and Messiah.

i. **Repent** sounds like such a harsh word in the mouths of many preachers and in the ears of many listeners, but it is an essential aspect of the gospel. **Repent** has been rightly called "the first word of the gospel."

ii. When John the Baptist preached, he said *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!* (Mat_3:2). When Jesus began to preach, He said *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Mat_4:17). Now when Peter begins to preach, he starts with **repent!**

iii. Repentance must never be thought of as something we must do *before* we can come back to God. Repentance describes what coming to God is. You can't turn *towards* God without turning *from* the things He is against.

iv. In this sense, **repent** is a word of great hope. It says "You don't have to continue the way you've been going, you can turn to God," something many people desperately want.

d. The second thing Peter says they must do is **be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ**, as an expression of their belief and complete trust in Him.

i. Baptism made a clear statement. In that day, Jews were not commonly baptized, only Gentiles who wanted to become Jews. For these Jewish men and women to be

baptized showed just how strongly they felt they needed Jesus.

ii. “While baptism with water was the expected symbol for conversion, it was not an indispensable criterion for salvation.” (Longenecker)

e. **The promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off:** As they repented and demonstrated faith and obedience by baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit would be given to them as it was given to the original group of disciples. Peter also specifically promised that the **promise** of the Holy Spirit would be given to those who believe in all succeeding generations (**all who are afar off**).

i. They saw the glorious work of the Holy Spirit among the disciples, and Peter told them that it was something that these people could take part in; they didn’t only have to be observers. And since the promise is for **all who are afar off**, it includes all people up to the present time.

f. **And with many other words he testified and exhorted them:** Peter’s sermon didn’t end there. He continued to urge the crowd to come to Jesus in repentant surrender.

g. **Be saved from this perverse generation:** Any generation that is responsible for putting Jesus to death is a **perverse generation**. But since *every* generation is responsible for Jesus’ death, every generation needs salvation.

3. (Act_2:41) The response to Peter’s sermon.

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.

a. **About three thousand souls were added to them:** This day of Pentecost saw an amazing harvest of souls. The church went from about 120 people to 3,120 people in one day.

i. Think of how this touched lives. Many of the 3,000 were undoubtedly pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the feast of

Pentecost, expecting something special from God, but not expecting anything like this. Many in this crowd would eventually travel far from Jerusalem, back to their homes, taking the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

b. Those who gladly received his word were baptized:

Those who believed on Jesus that day did so **gladly**, even making a dramatic statement in baptism. They would not have submitted to baptism unless they were fully convinced of who Jesus was and their great need for Him as a Savior.

i. How could you baptize 3,000 people? There were huge resources of water available on the temple mount, and pools and reservoirs nearby, so it was not difficult to find a place where the baptisms could take place.

c. What a baptism service that must have been! But God continues to do such great things. After the 1990 Summer Harvest Crusade, there was a mass baptism at Corona del Mar. They couldn't count how many were baptized, but the event was attended by more than 5,000 people. It was reported as the largest baptism service in the history of America.

D. The life of these first believers.

1. (Act_2:42) The foundation of their Christian life.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

a. On the day of Pentecost, the sound of the rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and the conversion of 3,000 were all remarkable events; but the things described in Act_2:42 were the abiding legacy of God's work.

b. First, they **continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine**: They relied on the apostles to communicate to them who Jesus was and what He had done. They just trusted in Jesus; now they want to know more!

i. **Continued steadfastly** uses a Greek verb communicating "a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action." (Longenecker) There was to be no

departure from the **apostles' doctrine**, because it was the truth of God.

ii. Thankfully, God allows us to sit under the **apostles' doctrine** - the New Testament record. Every pastor should seek to be unoriginal, in the sense that we don't have our own doctrine, but the **apostles' doctrine**.

c. They continued in **fellowship**: The Greek word *koinonia* has the idea of association, communion, fellowship, and participation; it means to *share* in something.

i. As Christians, we share the same Lord Jesus, we share the same guide for life, we share the same love for God, we share the same desire to worship Him, we share the same struggles, we share the same victories, we share the same job of living for Him, we share the same joy of communicating that gospel to others.

d. They continued **in the breaking of bread**: Even living so close to the time when Jesus was crucified, they still never wanted to forget it - how much more should we?

e. They continued **in prayers**. Whenever God's work is done, God's people are praying.

f. Everything else we read about the power and glory of the early church flows from this foundation of the word, fellowship, remembrance of Jesus' work on the cross, and prayer.

i. From Luke's description of the early Christian community, "The educated reader would have got the impression here that the Greek ideal of society had been realized." (Dictionary of New Testament Theology) 2. (Act_2:43) The presence of the power of God.

Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

a. The power of God was evident because **fear came upon every soul**. One of the greatest, most powerful works God can do is to change the human heart towards a reverent honor of the Lord.

b. The power of God was evident because **many wonders and signs were done**, and where God is moving, lives will be touched in miraculous ways.

3. (Act_2:44-45) Their close hearts and sharing in the common life of Jesus.

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

a. **Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common:** With the influx of more than 3,000 believers, most of whom stayed in Jerusalem and didn't have jobs, the family of Christians *had* to share if they were to survive.

i. We shouldn't regard this as "early communism," because it was voluntary, temporary, and flawed to the extent that the church in Jerusalem was in continual need of financial support from other churches. Also, we don't have any evidence this continued very long.

b. The Jews had a tremendous custom of hospitality during any major feast like Pentecost; all visitors were received into private homes, and no one could charge for giving a bed or a room to a visitor or for supplying their basic needs. The Christians took this tremendous feast-time hospitality and made it an everyday thing.

c. **Sold their possessions and their goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need:** The power of God is evident here because Jesus became much more important to them than their possessions.

4. (Act_2:46-47) The Christian family lived together and grew.

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

a. **So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house:** The church is meant to worship God and learn His Word together, but it is meant to do more; God wants us to share our *lives* with one another.

b. **Praising God and having favor with all the people:** Their Christian experience was daily, joyful and simple - good examples for us to follow.

c. **And the *Lord* added to the church daily those who were being saved:** This is God's prescription for church growth. If we take care to follow the example of Act_2:42-47 a, God will take care of growing the church Himself.

(Act 2:2) Suddenly² a sound³ like a violent wind blowing⁴ came from heaven⁵ and filled the entire house where they were sitting.

(Act 2:3) And tongues spreading out like a fire⁶ appeared to them and came to rest on each one of them.

(Act 2:4) All⁷ of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages⁸ as the Spirit enabled them.⁹

(Act 2:5) Now there were devout Jews¹⁰ from every nation under heaven residing in Jerusalem.¹¹

(Act 2:6) When this sound¹² occurred, a crowd gathered and was in confusion,¹³ because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

(Act 2:7) Completely baffled, they said,¹⁴ "Aren't¹⁵ all these who are speaking Galileans?

(Act 2:8) And how is it that each one of us hears them¹⁶ in our own native language?¹⁷

(Act 2:9) Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia,¹⁸

(Act 2:10) Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene,¹⁹ and visitors from Rome,²⁰

(Act 2:11) both Jews and proselytes,²¹ Cretans and Arabs — we hear them speaking in our own languages about the

great deeds God has done!"²²

(Act 2:12) All were astounded and greatly confused, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"

(Act 2:13) But others jeered at the speakers,²³ saying, "They are drunk on new wine!"²⁴

(Act 2:14) ***Peter's Address on the Day of Pentecost***

But Peter stood up²⁵ with the eleven, raised his voice, and addressed them: "You men of Judea²⁶ and all you who live in Jerusalem,²⁷ know this²⁸ and listen carefully to what I say.

(Act 2:15) In spite of what you think, these men are not drunk,²⁹ for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.³⁰

(Act 2:16) But this is what was spoken about through the prophet Joel:³¹

(Act 2:17) ' ***And*** in the last days³² ***it will be,*** ' ***God says,***
' ***that I will pour out my Spirit on all people,*** ³³
and your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
and your young men will see visions,
and your old men will dream dreams.

(Act 2:18) ***Even on my servants,*** ³⁴ ***both men and women,***
I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ³⁵

(Act 2:19) ***And I will perform wonders in the sky*** ³⁶
above
and miraculous signs ³⁷ ***on the earth below,***
blood and fire and clouds of smoke.

(Act 2:20) ***The sun will be changed to darkness***

and the moon to blood

before the great and glorious 38 day of the Lord comes.

(Act 2:21) ***And then 39 everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. '40***

(Act 2:22) "Men of Israel,⁴¹ listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man clearly attested to you by God with powerful deeds,⁴²

wonders, and miraculous signs⁴³ that God performed among you through him, just as you yourselves know —

(Act 2:23) this man, who was handed over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you executed⁴⁴ by nailing him to a cross at the hands of Gentiles.⁴⁵

(Act 2:24) But God raised him up,⁴⁶ having released⁴⁷ him from the pains⁴⁸ of death, because it was not possible for him to be held in its power.⁴⁹

(Act 2:25) For David says about him,

***' I saw the Lord always in front of me, 50
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken.***

(Act 2:26) ***Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced;***

my body 51 also will live in hope,

(Act 2:27) ***because you will not leave my soul in Hades, 52***

nor permit your Holy One to experience 53 decay.

(Act 2:28) ***You have made known to me the paths of life;***

you will make me full of joy with your presence. '54

(Act 2:29) "Brothers,⁵⁵ I can speak confidently⁵⁶ to you about our forefather⁵⁷ David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

(Act 2:30) So then, because⁵⁸ he was a prophet and knew that God *had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants* ⁵⁹ *on his throne*,⁶⁰

(Act 2:31) David by foreseeing this⁶¹ spoke about the resurrection of the Christ,⁶² that *he was neither abandoned to Hades*,⁶³ nor did his body⁶⁴ *experience* ⁶⁵ *decay*.⁶⁶

(Act 2:32) This Jesus God raised up, and we are all witnesses of it.⁶⁷

(Act 2:33) So then, exalted⁶⁸ to the right hand⁶⁹ of God, and having received⁷⁰ the promise of the Holy Spirit⁷¹ from the Father, he has poured out⁷² what you both see and hear.

(Act 2:34) For David did not ascend into heaven, but he himself says,

' *The Lord said to my lord,:*

" *Sit* ⁷³ *at my right hand*

(Act 2:35) ***until I make your enemies a footstool* ⁷⁴ *for your feet.*** " ⁷⁵

(Act 2:36) Therefore let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt⁷⁶ that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified⁷⁷ both Lord⁷⁸ and Christ."⁷⁹

(Act 2:37) ***The Response to Peter's Address***

Now when they heard this,⁸⁰ they were acutely distressed⁸¹ and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "What should we do, brothers?"

(Act 2:38) Peter said to them, "Repent, and each one of you be baptized⁸² in the name of Jesus Christ⁸³ for⁸⁴ the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁵

(Act 2:39) For the promise⁸⁶ is for you and your children, and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself."

(Act 2:40) With many other words he testified⁸⁷ and exhorted them saying, "Save yourselves from this perverse⁸⁸ generation!"

(Act 2:41) So those who accepted⁸⁹ his message⁹⁰ were baptized, and that day about three thousand people⁹¹ were added.⁹²

(Act 2:42) ***The Fellowship of the Early Believers***

They were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship,⁹³ to the breaking of bread and to prayer.⁹⁴

(Act 2:43) Reverential awe⁹⁵ came over everyone,⁹⁶ and many wonders and miraculous signs⁹⁷ came about by the apostles.

(Act 2:44) All who believed were together and held⁹⁸ everything in common,

(Act 2:45) and they began selling⁹⁹ their property¹⁰⁰ and possessions and distributing the proceeds¹⁰¹ to everyone, as anyone had need.

(Act 2:46) Every day¹⁰² they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts,¹⁰³ breaking bread from¹⁰⁴ house to house, sharing their food with glad¹⁰⁵ and humble hearts,¹⁰⁶

(Act 2:47) praising God and having the good will¹⁰⁷ of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day¹⁰⁸ those who were being saved.

(Act 3:1) ***Peter and John Heal a Lame Man at the Temple***

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time¹ for prayer,² at three o'clock in the afternoon.³

(Guzik)

Act 3:1-26

Acts 3 - A LAME MAN HEALED

A. The healing of the paralytic at the Gate Beautiful.

1. (Act_3:1-3) The request of the paralyzed beggar.

Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms.

a. We were told *many signs and wonders were done through the apostles* in Act_2:43; this chapter gives a specific example, one of the *many*.

b. **At the hour of prayer:** Apparently, Peter and John saw no problem in continuing their Jewish custom of prayer at certain hours of the day.

i. Morgan points out that Peter and John were *not* going to the temple at the hour of *sacrifice*, but **at the hour of prayer** which followed the afternoon sacrifice.

ii. Calvin saw a missionary intent in what Peter and John did: "Furthermore, if any man ask, whether the apostles went up into the temple that they might pray according to the rite of the law, I do not think that that is a thing so likely to be true, as they might have better opportunity to spread abroad the gospel."

c. **The gate of the temple which is called beautiful:**

The Jewish historian Josephus describes a gate made of fine Corinthian brass at the temple, seventy-five feet high with huge double doors, so beautiful that it "greatly excelled those that were only covered over with silver and gold." (Cited in Stott)

d. **To ask alms:** The lame man simply wanted to be *supported* in the condition that he was in. God wanted to completely change his condition.

i. When Peter and John gave him no money, we might have heard him complain: "You don't care about me. You

won't support me. Look at the mess I'm in." But Peter and John have no interest in supporting him in his mess.

They want to transform his life by the power of the risen Jesus Christ.

ii. "It is not the Church's business in this world to simply make the present condition more bearable; the task of the Church is to release here on earth the redemptive work of God in Christ." (LaSor)

2. (Act_3:4-10) The healing of the lame man.

And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them; walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

a. The lame man was correct in **expecting to receive something from them**, but he received much more than the monetary donation he would have been satisfied with!

i. Many of us haven't even come to the place where we really expect something from God. This is *faith*, plain and simple, even if the man was expecting the wrong thing.

ii. Better yet, we should expect the right things from God. We are so often ready to settle for much less than God wants to give us, and our low expectations often rob us.

b. **Silver and gold I do not have**: Peter didn't have any money, but he did have authority from Jesus to heal the sick (**what I do have I give to you**). Peter knew what it was like to have God use him to heal others, because Jesus had trained him in this (Luk_9:1-6).

i. For some people, to say **silver and gold I do not have** is about the worst thing anyone can say. They feel the church is in ruins if it must say “**silver and gold I do not have.**” But how much worse it is if the church does not have the spiritual power to say, “**In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk**”?

ii. There is a story about a humble monk walking with a Roman Catholic cardinal at a time in the Middle Ages when the Roman Catholic church was at its zenith of power, prestige and wealth. The cardinal pointed to the opulent surroundings and said to the monk, “We no longer have to say, **silver and gold I do not have** . ” The monk replied, “But neither can you say, **In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk** . ”

c. Peter said, **what I do have I give you**. He gave the lame man power in the name of Jesus, but he could not give it unless he had it in his own life. Many people want to be able to say **rise up and walk** without having received the power of Jesus in their own lives.

d. **And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up**: It was one thing to say, “**rise up and walk,**” but it was another thing entirely to so boldly take the man’s hand and lift him to his feet. At this moment, Peter was receiving the *gift of faith* described in 1Co_12:9. This is a supernatural ability to trust God in a particular situation.

i. This wasn’t something Peter did on a whim or as a promotional event; he did it under the specific prompting of the Holy Spirit. God gave Peter the supernatural ability to trust Him for something completely out of the ordinary.

e. **Immediately his feet and bones received strength**: Strength did not come to the lame man until Peter said “**rise up and walk,**” and not until Peter **took him by the right hand and lifted him up**.

f. **Entered the temple . . . walking, leaping, and praising God**: As soon as he was healed, the formerly lame man did three good things. First, he attached himself to the

apostles (**entered the temple with them**). Secondly, he immediately started to use what God had given him (**walking, leaping**). Finally, he began to praise and worship God (**praising God**).

g. **Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms**: If this man was more than 40 years old (Act_4:22), and had been crippled since birth, and was a familiar sight at this temple gate (Act_3:10), then Jesus must have passed him by many times without healing him. Why? Because God's timing is just as important as His will, and it was for the greater glory of God that Jesus heal this man from heaven through His apostles.

B. Peter preaches to the gathered crowd.

1. (Act_3:11-12) Introduction: Why do you think we have done something great?

Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. So when Peter saw *it*, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

a. **When Peter saw it, he responded to the people**: Peter wisely takes advantage of the crowd, but he knew that the phenomenon of the miraculous in itself brought no one to Jesus, it merely aroused interest. Though they were **greatly amazed**, they weren't saved yet!

i. Peter knew that saving faith did not come by seeing or hearing about miracles, rather *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Rom_10:17).

b. Peter denies that the healing is due to either his **power or godliness**. Many "healers" today who would never claim to heal in their own power still give the impression that healing happens because they are so spiritual, so close to God, or so godly. Peter knew that it was all of Jesus and nothing was of him.

c. **Why do you marvel at this?** Peter's point is simple: Jesus healed all sorts of people when He walked this earth, so why should it seem strange that He continues to heal from heaven?

2. (Act_3:13-18) Peter preaches Jesus.

"The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *Him* go. But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Yet now, brethren, I know that you did *it* in ignorance, as *did* also your rulers. But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled."

a. Peter makes it clear which God he is speaking of; this is the **God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**.

i. In our modern world, there are so many different (and strange) ideas about God, it is helpful for us to be clear about which God we serve and speak about. We can say "God" when talking to someone else, without realizing that our idea of God and their idea of God are completely different. Perhaps it would be helpful for us to more carefully define the God we are speaking of: The God of the Bible, the **God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**.

b. **His Servant Jesus**: The greatness of Peter's sermon is that it is all about Jesus. The focus on the sermon is not on Peter or anything he has done, but all about Jesus.

c. **Whom you delivered up and denied**: Peter boldly lays the guilt of Jesus' death squarely where it belongs. **Pilate**, the Roman governor, was **determined to let Him go**, but

the Jewish mob insisted on the crucifixion of Jesus (Joh_18:29 to Joh_19:16).

i. Were the Jews guilty of the death of Jesus? Yes, but so were the Gentiles. The Romans would not have crucified Jesus without the Jews, and the Jews could not have crucified Jesus without the Romans. God made certain that

both Jew and Gentile shared in the guilt of Jesus' death. In fact, it was not political intrigue or circumstances that put Jesus on the cross. It was our sin. If you want to know who put Jesus on the cross, look at me - or look in the mirror.

ii. Peter was not afraid to confront their sin, and he shows amazing boldness. "One commentator says that the miracle of the speech of Peter is a far more wonderful one than the miracle wrought in the healing of the man who lay at the Beautiful Gate." (Morgan)

d. **Asked for a murderer to be granted to you:** One of the ironies of the crucifixion of Jesus is that while the crowd rejected Jesus, they embraced a criminal and a murderer named Barabbas (Luk_23:13-25, Joh_18:39-40). Peter is boldly confronting this audience!

e. **And killed the Prince of life:** Of course, **the Prince of life** could not remain in the grave, and the apostles are united **witnesses** of the fact of His resurrection.

f. **And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong:** Peter says that it is in the **name** of Jesus that this man has been made whole. This means more than Peter said, "in Jesus name." It means that Peter consciously did this in the authority and power of Jesus, not the authority and power of Peter. Peter will not even take credit for the *faith* that was exercised in the healing (**yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness**).

i. "In Semitic thought, a name does not just identify or distinguish a person, it expresses the very nature of his being. Hence the power of the person is present and available in the name of the person." (Longenecker)

g. **I know that you did it in ignorance:** Peter recognizes they called for the execution of Jesus in ignorance of God's eternal plan. This does not make them innocent, but it does carefully define the nature of their guilt. If we sin in ignorance, it is still sin, but it is different from sin done with full knowledge.

h. **He has thus fulfilled:** Despite all the evil they did to Jesus, it did not change or derail God's plan. God can take the most horrible evil and use it for good. Joseph could say to his brothers, "*you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.*" (Gen_50:20) The same principle was at work in the crucifixion of Jesus and is at work in our lives (Rom_8:28).

3. (Act_3:19-21) Peter's call to repentance.

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

a. **Repent therefore:** As he did in his first sermon (Act_2:38), Peter calls upon the crowd to **repent**. He is telling them to turn around in their thinking and actions.

i. Repentance does not describe being sorry, but describes the act of *turning around*. And as he used it in chapter two, here also Peter makes **repent** a word of *hope*. You have done wrong, but you can turn around to get it right with God!

b. **And be converted:** Conversion is a work God does in us. Being a Christian is not "turning over a new leaf," it is being a *new creation in Christ Jesus* (2Co_5:17).

c. **Blotted out** has the idea of wiping ink off of a document. Ink in the ancient world had no acid content and didn't "bite"

into the paper. It could almost always be wiped off with a damp cloth. Peter is saying that God will wipe away our record of sin just like that!

d. What are the **times of refreshing** Peter spoke of? He is referring to the time when Jesus returns and rules the earth in righteousness. Peter goes so far as to say, “**that He may send Jesus Christ,**” thus implying that if the Jews as a nation repented, God the Father would send Jesus to return in glory.

i. Peter makes it clear that Jesus will remain in heaven **until the times of restoration of all things**, and since the repentance of Israel is one of the **all things**, there is some sense in which the return of Jesus in glory will not happen until Israel repents.

ii. Peter is essentially offering Israel the opportunity to hasten the return of Jesus by embracing Him on a national level, something that must happen before Jesus will return (Mat_23:37-39; Rom_11:25-27).

iii. One may raise the hypothetical question, *if* the Jews of that day would have received the gospel on a national level, *then* would Jesus have returned way back then? Hypothetically, this may have been the case, but there is no point in speculating about something that *didn't happen*!

4. (Act_3:22-26) Peter warns of the danger of rejecting Jesus. “For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be *that* every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities.”

a. **For Moses truly said to the fathers:** The Jews of Peter's day were aware of this prophecy of Moses (recorded in Deu_18:15; Deu_18:18-19), but some thought that the **Prophet** would be someone different than the *Messiah*; Peter makes it clear that they are one and the same.

b. **Every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed:** The destruction promised in the prophecy would become the legacy of this generation of Jews. Many, but not all, of this generation rejected Jesus twice over.

c. Hidden in the idea of the promise to Abraham (**all the families of the earth shall be blessed**) and in the words **to you first** is the undeveloped theme of the extension of the gospel to all the world - even Gentiles.

d. **Sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities:** God's desire to bless us and to do good for us also includes His desire to turn us all away from our sins.

i. Just as the lame man was hindered by expecting something from God, but expecting the wrong thing, so it was

with the Jewish people at this time. They were expecting the Messiah, but not the right kind of Messiah. They were looking for a political Messiah, not one to turn **every one of you from your iniquities**. Are you expecting the right things from God today?

(Act 3:2) And a man lame⁴ from birth⁵ was being carried up, who was placed at the temple gate called "the Beautiful Gate" every day⁶ so he could beg for money⁷ from those going into the temple courts.⁸

(Act 3:3) When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple courts,⁹ he asked them for money.¹⁰

(Act 3:4) Peter looked directly¹¹ at him (as did John) and said, "Look at us!"

(Act 3:5) So the lame man¹² paid attention to them, expecting to receive something from them.

(Act 3:6) But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold,¹³ but what I do have I give you. In the name¹⁴ of Jesus Christ¹⁵ the Nazarene, stand up and¹⁶ walk!"

(Act 3:7) Then¹⁷ Peter¹⁸ took hold¹⁹ of him by the right hand and raised him up, and at once the man's²⁰ feet and ankles were made strong.²¹

(Act 3:8) He²² jumped up,²³ stood and began walking around, and he entered the temple courts²⁴ with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

(Act 3:9) All²⁵ the people saw him walking and praising God,

(Act 3:10) and they recognized him as the man who used to sit and ask for donations²⁶ at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with astonishment and amazement²⁷ at what had happened to him.

(Act 3:11) ***Peter Addresses the Crowd***

While the man²⁸ was hanging on to Peter and John, all the people, completely astounded, ran together to them in the covered walkway²⁹ called Solomon's Portico.³⁰

(Act 3:12) When Peter saw this, he declared to the people, "Men of Israel,³¹ why are you amazed at this? Why³² do you stare at us as if we had made this man³³ walk by our own power or piety?

(Act 3:13) The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,³⁴ the God of our forefathers,³⁵ has glorified³⁶ his servant³⁷ Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected³⁸ in the presence of Pilate after he had decided³⁹ to release him.

(Act 3:14) But you rejected⁴⁰ the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a man who was a murderer be released to you.

(Act 3:15) You killed⁴¹ the Originator⁴² of life, whom God raised⁴³ from the dead. To this fact we are witnesses!⁴⁴

(Act 3:16) And on the basis of faith in Jesus'⁴⁵ name,⁴⁶ his very name has made this man — whom you see and know — strong. The⁴⁷

faith that is through Jesus⁴⁸ has given him this complete health in the presence⁴⁹ of you all.

(Act 3:17) And now, brothers, I know you acted in ignorance,⁵⁰ as your rulers did too.

(Act 3:18) But the things God foretold⁵¹ long ago through⁵² all the prophets — that his Christ⁵³ would suffer — he has fulfilled in this way.

(Act 3:19) Therefore repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out,

(Act 3:20) so that times of refreshing⁵⁴ may come from the presence of the Lord,⁵⁵ and so that he may send the Messiah⁵⁶ appointed⁵⁷

for you — that is, Jesus.

(Act 3:21) This one⁵⁸ heaven must⁵⁹ receive until the time all things are restored,⁶⁰ which God declared⁶¹ from times long ago⁶²

through his holy prophets.

(Act 3:22) Moses said, ' ***The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers. You must***

obey ⁶³ ***him in everything he tells you.***⁶⁴

(Act 3:23) ***Every person*** ⁶⁵ ***who does not obey that prophet will be destroyed and thus removed*** ⁶⁶ ***from the people.***⁶⁷

(Act 3:24) And all the prophets, from Samuel and those who followed him, have spoken about and announced⁶⁸ these days.

(Act 3:25) You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your ancestors,⁶⁹ saying to Abraham, ' ***And in your***

descendants ⁷⁰ ***all the nations*** ⁷¹ ***of the earth will be blessed.***⁷²

(Act 3:26) God raised up⁷³ his servant and sent him first to you, to bless you by turning⁷⁴ each one of you from your iniquities."⁷⁵

(Act 4:1) ***The Arrest and Trial of Peter and John***

While Peter and John¹ were speaking to the people, the priests and the commander² of the temple guard³ and the Sadducees⁴

came up⁵ to them,
(Guzik)

Act 4:1-37

Acts 4 - PETER AND JOHN FACE THE SANHEDRIN

A. Peter preaches to the Jewish leaders.

1. (Act_4:1-4) The arrest of Peter and John.

Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

a. The **captain of the temple** refers to the “police force” of the temple precincts: The **captain**, together with the priests and the Sadducees, all came together to arrest Peter and John.

b. The **Sadducees** *would* be **greatly disturbed** that Peter and John **preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead**; they did not believe in the afterlife or resurrection at all.

c. They **put them into custody until the next day** because it was illegal under Jewish law to have a trial by night, though this is what the Jewish rulers did to Jesus.

i. From the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 4.1: “Judgments about money may be commenced in the day and concluded in the night, but judgments about life must be begun in the day and concluded in the day” (cited in Williams).

ii. There was nothing wrong in the way that the Jewish leaders were investigating the matter; it was their

responsibility to do so. What they did after they found out the facts was wrong.

d. **The number of the men came to be about five thousand:** Despite the opposition coming against the gospel, the number of Christians keeps increasing, growing to 5,000 from 3,000 at last count (Act_2:41). Opposition did not slow the church down at all.

i. In the Western world, Christians rarely face persecution. Satan instead has attacked us with worldliness, selfish pride, a need for acceptance, and status. The martyr can impress unbelievers with his courage and faith; the self-centered, compromising Christian is despised by the world.

2. (Act_4:5-7) Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin.

And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"

a. **Rulers, elders, and scribes:** These Jewish rulers are the same ones who recently condemned Jesus to death. Peter and John, standing before the Jewish rulers, must have thought that the trial of Jesus was going to happen all over again and they would be crucified like their Master, but it didn't seem to matter.

b. The ideas behind **by what power** and **by what name** are virtually the same. In their thinking, the **power** resided in the **name**, because the **name** represented the character of the person.

3. (Act_4:8-12) Peter boldly preaches to the Jewish leaders. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he

has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

a. He is instantly **filled with the Spirit** again, evident by his supernatural boldness and ability to speak directly to the heart of the matter.

i. The filling of the Holy Spirit Peter experienced in Act_2:4 (along with other disciples) was not a one-time event; it was something God wanted to keep doing in their lives.

b. The tone of Peter's reply - especially when he says "**If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man**" - shows that he is not intimidated by this court, though humanly speaking, he should be intimidated by the same court that sent Jesus to crucifixion.

i. **For a good deed**: Peter's logic is piercing - why are we on trial for a **good deed**?

c. **By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth**: Peter preaches **Jesus**, the Jesus *they crucified*, the Jesus **God raised from the dead**, the Jesus who healed this man.

d. **This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders'**: The quotation from Psa_118:22 is appropriate. Jesus was rejected by men but exalted by His Father.

e. Peter doesn't merely proclaim Jesus as *a way* of salvation, but as the *only way* of salvation. The idea that there is no **salvation in any other**, and that there **is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved** is an offensive one in our pluralistic, eclectic age; but it is the plain teaching of the Bible.

i. Does this mean that everyone must make a personal decision for Jesus Christ? What about the infant who dies?

What about the person who has never heard about Jesus? God will deal with them fairly and justly, and those who are saved will be saved by the work of Jesus done on their behalf, even if they lacked a full knowledge of Jesus. But what about you?

ii. If you wish to believe that all are saved or that there are many roads to heaven or that you can take the best of all faiths and blend them into one, fine, believe so and bear the consequences; *but please do not* claim this is the teaching of the Bible.

B. The Jewish rulers react to Peter's sermon.

1. (Act_4:13) What they saw in Peter and John's character.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled.

And they realized that they had been with Jesus.

a. **They were uneducated and untrained men:** Indeed, Peter and John were Galilean fishermen with no formal education, but they had the one essential qualification for ministry - **they had been with Jesus.**

i. It was as if the Sanhedrin said, "These guys are just like Jesus! We thought we solved the Jesus problem when we crucified Him, but now it is worse than ever!"

ii. People *should* go to Jesus directly, but often they won't. The only Jesus they are going to see is what shines through us. We must work to make the fact that we have **been with Jesus** as obvious in our lives as it was in theirs.

b. **They saw the boldness of Peter and John:** Because they had **been with Jesus**, they are naturally bold. When you are a servant of the all-powerful God, what do you fear from the courts of man?

i. "A few men unarmed, furnished with no garrisons, do show forth more power in their voice alone, than all the world, by raging against them." (Calvin)

d. "It is particularly striking that neither on this nor on any subsequent occasion . . . did the Sanhedrin take any serious

action to disprove the apostles' central affirmation - the resurrection of Jesus. Had it seemed possible to refute them on this point, how readily would the Sanhedrin seized the opportunity! Had they succeeded, how quickly and completely the new movement would have collapsed!" (Bruce)

2. (Act_4:14) What they saw in the man who was healed.

And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

a. **They could say nothing against it:** This miracle was examined by doubters and stood up as a genuine miracle. This was not a case where the healing was "lost" in a few hours, as some claim happens today.

b. Previously, this man was completely lame, having to be carried wherever he went (Act_3:2), and now he was completely healed. This contrasts many who get up out of wheelchairs at modern "healing services" yet come with a limited ability to walk, but are able for a few moments to walk much better because of the hype, emotion, and adrenaline. Yet they tragically leave the arena in the wheelchair, having "lost" their healing.

3. (Act_4:15-18) Taking counsel, the Jewish leaders command Peter and John to stop preaching Jesus.

But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name." And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

a. **They conferred among themselves:** How did Luke ever find out what the Sanhedrin discussed among themselves?

Undoubtedly, because member of that Sanhedrin later became a Christian: Saul of Tarsus.

b. **We cannot deny it:** The corruption of their hearts is plain. They acknowledge that a miracle has genuinely happened, yet they refuse to submit to the God who worked the miracle.

c. **So that it spreads no further among the people:** Their fear of the preaching of Jesus was rooted in their own sinful self-interest, not in any desire to protect the people.

d. How did Luke know the private discussions of the Sanhedrin? In all likelihood, there was a dynamic, brilliant young rabbi present among the Sanhedrin named Saul of Tarsus who later reported all this to Luke.

i. Even though Saul himself did not know it, God was working in his heart through Peter and John. They had no idea they were preaching to a future apostle and the greatest missionary the church would ever see. We have no idea how greatly God can use us!

4. (Act_4:19-20) Peter and John respond to the command to stop preaching Jesus.

But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

a. **Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge:** It is self-evident that they should listen to God instead of man. Peter makes an effective appeal to this truth.

b. **We cannot but speak:** Peter and John *must* speak of the **things which** they had **seen and heard**. They had to, not only because of the inner compulsion of the Holy Spirit, but also because of the command of Jesus: *You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem* (Act_1:8)

c. They did not originate this message; they merely **speak the things which we have seen and heard**, as reliable eyewitnesses.

5. (Act_4:21-22) Peter and John are released with threats of future punishment.

So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

a. **Finding no way of punishing them, because of the people:** The Jewish leaders were completely unmoved by an obvious miracle from God, yet they would respond to public opinion. This proves they cared far more about man's opinion than God's opinion.

b. **They all glorified God for what had been done:** This whole situation started out looking pretty bad. Peter and John were on trial before the same court that sent Jesus to Pilate for crucifixion. Satan meant it all for great evil, but before it is all over, see what God did:

- i. Two thousand more people come to believe on Jesus.
- ii. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit again.
- iii. Peter gets to preach Jesus to the leaders of the Jews.
- iv. Hostile examiners confirm a miraculous healing.
- v. The enemies of Jesus are confused.
- vi. Peter and John are bolder for Jesus than ever before.
- vii. God is glorified.

C. The early church prays for boldness.

1. (Act_4:23-24) Introduction: They acknowledge their God. And being let go, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them."

a. They **reported all that the chief priests and elders had said:** We can just picture Peter and John saying, "They let us tell them about Jesus! They realized we were like Jesus! They told us not to tell others about Jesus!"

b. **They raised their voice:** They prayed *vocally*. It is certainly possible to pray silently in our minds, but we can focus our thoughts more effectively when we speak out our prayers.

i. It isn't that they all prayed, speaking at the same time. One person prayed, and all agreed with that one, so that they were really praying with one voice (**voice** is in the singular).

ii. "With one accord they lift up their voice to God. This does not mean that they all prayed at once. That would have been confusion. Disorder in meetings, a number of people talking at the same time in a boisterous way with outward demonstrations, is an evidence that the Holy Spirit is not leading, for God is not a God of disorder."

(Gaebelein)

c. **With one accord:** They prayed in *unity*. There was no strife or contention among them. There wasn't one group saying, "we should pray for this" and another saying, "we should pray for that." They had the same mind when they prayed.

d. **Lord, You are God:** They begin by reminding themselves who they are praying to. They are praying to the Lord of all creation, the God of all power.

i. This word **Lord** is not the usual word for "Lord" in the New Testament; it is the Greek word *despotes*. It was a word used of a slave owner or ruler who has power that cannot be questioned. They prayed with power and confidence because they knew God was in control.

ii. When we pray, we often forget just who it is we are praying to, or worse yet, we pray to an imaginary God of our own ideas. The disciples had power in prayer because they knew *who they were praying to*.

2. (Act_4:25-28) They pray in light of the Scriptures.

"Who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were

gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ.’ For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.”

a. **By the mouth of Your servant David have said:** Peter, speaking for all the disciples (remember they were praying *with one accord*), recognized that words of the Old Testament (Psalms 2 to be exact) were really the words of God. God was speaking **by the mouth of [His] servant David.**

b. Why did Peter quote Psalms 2 here? Because he and the other disciples understand what is happening to them by seeing what the Bible says about it. From Psalms 2, they understand that they should expect this sort of opposition and not be troubled because of it.

i. When we pray, we must see our circumstances in light of God’s Word. For example, when we are in conflict, perhaps we need to know *we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age.* (Eph_6:12)

ii. Seeing our circumstances in light of God’s Word also means seeing when there is a sin problem. Then, we should say with the Psalmist, *When I kept it all inside, my bones turned to powder, my words became daylong groans.*

The pressure never let up; all the juices of my life dried up. (Psa_32:3-4, Peterson). Perhaps we are in the same place the Psalmist was, in sin and needing to confess and get right with God.

iii. We also use Scripture in prayer to pray the promises of God. When we need strength, we can pray according to Eph_3:16 : *That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.* God’s Word will speak to our situation!

c. Because they saw their circumstances in light of God's Word, they could recognize that the wrath of man never operated outside of the sphere of God's control; these enemies of Jesus could only **do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.**

i. This brings real peace, knowing that whatever comes my way has passed through God's hand first, and He will not allow even the most wicked acts of men to result in permanent damage.

3. (Act_4:29-30) They ask for more boldness, more power, and (essentially) more trouble!

"Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."

a. **Grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word:** This request is consumed with God's cause and glory, not the comfort and advancement of the disciples. They ask for things that will lead to *more* confrontation, not less!

b. **By stretching out Your hand to heal:** They do not ask to do miracles themselves. They understand that Jesus heals by His hand, only He does it from heaven through His people.

i. It is a snare to long to be used to do miraculous things. It is often rooted in the pride that wants everyone to see just how greatly God can use *me*. I should be delighted in the power of God, not because He has used *me* to display it.

4. (Act_4:31) Their prayer is answered.

And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

a. **The place where they were assembled together was shaken:** They were given an earthquake as a unique

emblem of God's pleasure. We don't know the extent of the shaking; it may have been confined to the house itself.

i. This earthquake is recorded in Act_4:31. Someone pointed out that the significant 1994 Northridge earthquake happened Act_4:31 in the morning!

b. **They were all filled with the Holy Spirit:** They are filled with the Holy Spirit, *again*.

i. The idea that we are "Spirit filled" only at an experience known as the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" is wrong, though there may be a wonderful and first yielding to the Spirit's power. We must be continually filled with the Holy Spirit, and make our "immersion" in Him a constant experience.

c. They received the **boldness** they asked for. "The word *boldness* means lucid and daring statement. In the Greek the word is *parresia*, 'telling it all.'" (Ogilvie) i. What we need to be doing is *telling it all*. When we try to "hide" some of God's work in our lives from others, we aren't walking in the boldness Jesus would have us walk in.

ii. Their **boldness** was a gift from God, received through prayer. It was not something that they tried to work up in themselves.

D. The sharing heart of the early church.

1. (Act_4:32) Their attitude towards each other and towards material possessions.

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

a. **Those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of things he possessed was his own:** Because of their unity, they regarded *people* more important than *things*.

b. **They had all things in common:** They recognized God's ownership of everything; it all belonged to God and His people.

c. **All things in common:** Was this an early form of communism? There is a contrast between communism and *koinonia*. “Communism says, ‘What is yours is mine; I’ll take it.’ *Koinonia* says, ‘What is mine is yours, I’ll share it.’”

(LaSor)

i. “The Greek here does not mean that everyone sold their property at once. Rather, from time to time this was done as the Lord brought needs to their attention.” (Horton)

d. Some people think that this radical sharing of possessions among the early church was a mistake. They say it was based on the wrong idea that Jesus was returning immediately, and that it led to much poverty in the Jerusalem church later on.

2. (Act_4:33) The effective witness of the apostles.

And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.

a. **With great power:** This is both the result and the root of the attitude in the previous verse. Act_4:32 shows they were putting God first, people second, and material things a distant third.

b. **Gave witness to the resurrection:** Notice again the central place the resurrection of Jesus holds in the message of the first Christians. They preached a resurrected Jesus.

c. **Great grace was upon them all.** Grace is God’s favor, His smile from heaven, and it **was upon them all**. God’s favor was evident everywhere.

3. (Act_4:34-37) Examples of early giving.

Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles’ feet.

a. **All who were possessors of lands or houses sold them:** This radical giving was absolutely necessary to meet the needs of this rapidly growing church. Remember, many of these Jerusalem Christians came as “refugees” from abroad, having responded to the gospel on Pentecost.

b. **All who were possessors of lands:** People didn’t wait for someone else to give. When a need arose, they gave of their own possessions to help someone else.

i. Unfortunately, this generosity of the early Christians soon began to be abused, and Paul had to give strict instructions to the churches on who should be helped and how.

ii. Paul’s directions are that the church must discern who the truly needy are (1Ti_5:3). If one can work to support himself, he is not truly needy and must provide for his own needs (2Th_3:10-12, 1Ti_5:8, 1Th_4:11). If family can support a needy person, the church should not support them (1Ti_5:3-4). Those who are supported by the church must make some return to the church body (1Ti_5:5; 1Ti_5:10). It is right for the church to examine moral conduct before giving support (1Ti_5:9-13). And the support of the church should be for the most basic necessities of living (1Ti_6:8).

b. **Joses, who was also named Barnabas:** One man named **Barnabas** was a notable example of this giving spirit.

(Act 4:2) angry⁶ because they were teaching the people and announcing⁷ in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

(Act 4:3) So⁸ they seized⁹ them and put them in jail¹⁰ until the next day (for it was already evening).

(Act 4:4) But many of those who had listened to¹¹ the message¹² believed, and the number of the men¹³ came to about five thousand.

(Act 4:5) On the next day,¹⁴ their rulers, elders, and experts in the law¹⁵ came together¹⁶ in Jerusalem.¹⁷

(Act 4:6) Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others who were members of the high priest's family.¹⁸

(Act 4:7) After¹⁹ making Peter and John²⁰ stand in their midst, they began to inquire, "By what power or by what name²¹ did you do this?"

(Act 4:8) Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit,²² replied,²³ "Rulers of the people and elders,²⁴

(Act 4:9) if²⁵ we are being examined²⁶ today for a good deed²⁷ done to a sick man — by what means this man was healed²⁸ — (Act 4:10) let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ²⁹ the Nazarene whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, this man stands before you healthy.

(Act 4:11) This Jesus³⁰ is ***the stone that was rejected by you,³¹ the builders, that has become the cornerstone.***³²

(Act 4:12) And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people³³ by which we must³⁴ be saved."

(Act 4:13) When they saw the boldness³⁵ of Peter and John, and discovered³⁶ that they were uneducated³⁷ and ordinary³⁸ men, they were amazed and recognized these men had been with Jesus.

(Act 4:14) And because they saw the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say against this.³⁹

(Act 4:15) But when they had ordered them to go outside the council,⁴⁰ they began to confer with one another,

(Act 4:16) saying, "What should we do with these men? For it is plain⁴¹ to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable miraculous sign⁴² has come about through them,⁴³ and we cannot deny it.

(Act 4:17) But to keep this matter from spreading any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more⁴⁴ to anyone in this name."

(Act 4:18) And they called them in and ordered⁴⁵ them not to speak or teach at all in the name⁴⁶ of Jesus.

(Act 4:19) But Peter and John replied,⁴⁷ "Whether it is right before God to obey⁴⁸ you rather than God, you decide, (Act 4:20) for it is impossible⁴⁹ for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard."

(Act 4:21) After threatening them further, they released them, for they could not find how to punish them on account of the people, because they were all praising⁵⁰ God for what had happened.

(Act 4:22) For the man, on whom this miraculous sign⁵¹ of healing had been performed,⁵² was over forty years old.

(Act 4:23) ***The Followers of Jesus Pray for Boldness***

When they were released, Peter and John⁵³ went to their fellow believers⁵⁴ and reported everything the high priests and the elders had said to them.

(Act 4:24) When they heard this, they raised their voices to God with one mind⁵⁵ and said, "Master of all,⁵⁶ you who made the heaven, the earth,⁵⁷ the sea, and everything that is in them, (Act 4:25) who said by the Holy Spirit through⁵⁸ your servant David our forefather,⁵⁹

***' Why do the nations ⁶⁰ rage, ⁶¹
and the peoples plot foolish ⁶² things?***

(Act 4:26) ***The kings of the earth stood together, ⁶³
and the rulers assembled together,
against the Lord and against his ⁶⁴ Christ. ' ⁶⁵***

(Act 4:27) "For indeed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together in this city against⁶⁶ your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed,⁶⁷

(Act 4:28) to do as much as your power⁶⁸ and your plan⁶⁹ had decided beforehand⁷⁰ would happen.

(Act 4:29) And now, Lord, pay attention to⁷¹ their threats, and grant⁷² to your servants⁷³ to speak your message⁷⁴ with great courage,⁷⁵

(Act 4:30) while you extend your hand to heal, and to bring about miraculous signs⁷⁶ and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

(Act 4:31) When⁷⁷ they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken,⁷⁸ and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak⁷⁹ the word of God⁸⁰ courageously.⁸¹

(Act 4:32) ***Conditions Among the Early Believers***

The group of those who believed were of one heart and mind,⁸² and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but everything was held in common.⁸³

(Act 4:33) With⁸⁴ great power the apostles were giving testimony⁸⁵ to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on them all.

(Act 4:34) For there was no one needy⁸⁶ among them, because those who were owners of land or houses were selling⁸⁷ them⁸⁸ and bringing the proceeds from the sales (Act 4:35) and placing them at the apostles' feet. The proceeds⁸⁹ were distributed to each, as anyone had need.

(Act 4:36) So Joseph, a Levite who was a native of Cyprus, called by the apostles Barnabas (which is translated "son of encouragement"),⁹⁰

(Act 4:37) sold⁹¹ a field⁹² that belonged to him and brought the money⁹³ and placed it at the apostles' feet.

(Act 5:1) ***The Judgment on Ananias and Sapphira***

Now a man named Ananias, together with Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of property.

(Guzik)

Act 5:1-42

Acts 5 - THE CHURCH GROWS DESPITE OPPOSITION

A. The lie of Ananias and Sapphira.

1. (Act_5:1-2) What Ananias and Sapphira did.

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware *of it*, and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

a. After they saw the great generosity of Barnabas, and how well he was respected, Ananias and Sapphira decided they wanted some of the same respect.

b. **He kept back part of the proceeds:** They sold the **possession**, and gave only a *portion* to the church, while *implying* that they had sacrificially given it all to the church.

i. The word for **kept back** is *nosphizomai*, which means "to misappropriate." The same word was used of Achan's theft in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Jos_7:21), and in its only other New Testament use, it means to steal (Tit_2:10).

ii. "The story of Ananias is to the Book of Acts what the story of Achan is to the book of Joshua. In both narratives an act of deceit interrupts the victorious progress of the people of God." (Bruce)

c. **His wife also being aware of it:** Clearly, both husband and wife were in on the deception.

i. "There may indeed be the further implication that Ananias and Sapphira had vowed to give the whole proceeds of the sale to God, but then changed their mind and handed over only part." (Bruce)

ii. "Once the love of money takes possession of a person, there is no evil that he cannot or will not do." (Horton) iii. According to Calvin, these are the "evils packed under" the sin of Ananias, beyond the mere attempt to deceive God and the church: The contempt of God, sacrilegious defrauding, perverse vanity and ambition, lack of faith, the corrupting of a good and holy order, and hypocrisy.

2. (Act_5:3-6) Peter confronts Ananias.

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the

land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*.

a. **Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart:** God apparently gave Peter supernatural knowledge of what Ananias had done. This spiritual gift, called *the word of knowledge*, is mentioned in 1Co_12:8.

i. When Peter said this, Ananias must have been crushed. Certainly, he was expecting praise for his spectacular gift, but was rebuked instead.

b. **Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit:** Peter did not accuse Ananias of lying to the church, or to the apostles, but to the Holy Spirit Himself.

c. **While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?** Peter freely acknowledges that the land and its value belonged to Ananias alone; he was completely free to do with it what he wanted. His crime was not withholding the money, but in deceptively implying that he was giving it all.

i. Of course, his sin was greed (in keeping the money); but his greater sin was *pride*, in wanting everyone to consider him so spiritual that he “gave it all.”

ii. It wasn't that Ananias' gift wasn't big enough, but that *the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord* (Pro_15:8).

iii. The spirit of Ananias is alive and well in the church today. Far too many want to be considered “spiritual” while refusing to pay any kind of price in their service to God.

d. Their sin was so unnecessary: **While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?** Ananias was free to use the money for

whatever he wanted, *except* as a means to inflate his own spiritual pride.

e. Satan had **filled** the heart of Ananias, yet Peter could ask why he had **conceived this thing in your heart**. Satan can influence the life of a believer, even a spirit-filled believer, but he can't do your sinning for you. Ananias had to conceive it in his heart.

f. **Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last**: Peter did not pronounce a "death sentence" on Ananias. He simply confronted him with his sin and Ananias fell down dead. It isn't the business of the church to pronounce a "death sentence" on anyone!

i. "Observe that Peter said no word to Ananias about his death. The sentence was not calling down upon a man of a curse at the caprice of an ecclesiastical official. The death of Ananias was the act of God." (Morgan).

ii. Peter was probably more surprised than anyone when Ananias fell down dead!

g. God struck Ananias dead for his sin. Doesn't this seem rather harsh?

i. The greater wonder is that God delays His righteous judgment in virtually all other cases. Ananias received exactly what he deserved; he simply *could not* live in the atmosphere of purity that marked the church at that time.

ii. The physical means by which Ananias died was probably a heart attack. Ananias lived in a time, and among a people, who really believed there was a God in heaven we must all answer to. It frightened him to have his sin exposed and to know he was accountable before God for it. How many people would be frightened before God if confronted with sin like this? Today, too many people would yawn or debate if confronted with sin like this!

iii. What Ananias did also must be seen in the context of its time. This was a critical juncture for the early church, and such impurity, sin, scandal and satanic infiltration could have corrupted the entire church at its root. "The

Church has never been harmed or hindered by opposition from without; it has been perpetually harmed and hindered by perils from within.” (Morgan)

iv. Why don't we see God judge the same way now? In part, because the church has so many “branches.” Even if the entire body of Christ in the United States was to become corrupt through scandal or sin, there is plenty of strength in other parts of the “tree.”

v. “The Church’s administration to-day is not what it was, or there might be many dead men and women at the end of some services.” (Morgan)

h. The shock of being exposed was too much for Ananias. For many Christians in compromise, their greatest fear is not in sinning itself, but in being found out.

i. As much as anything, the lesson of Ananias and Sapphira is that we presume greatly on God when we assume that there is always time to repent, time to get right with God, time to get honest with Him. Any such time given by God is an undeserved gift that He owes no one; we should never assume it will always be there.

i. God’s purpose was accomplished in the church at large: **So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.** Surely, this is one of the great understatements of the Bible!

3. (Act_5:7-11) Peter confronts Sapphira.

Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter answered her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?” She said, “Yes, for so much.” Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband *are* at the door, and they will carry you out.” Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried *her* by her husband. So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.

a. **How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?** Sapphira was a knowing and willing participant in the sin, as well as the blatant cover-up. God's judgment of her is just as righteous as His judgment of Ananias.

b. We don't know if Ananias and Sapphira had a good or a bad marriage, if they agreed often or fought often. We do know that they at least **agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord**. They should have found agreement for the Lord, instead of against Him!

i. Married couples in the Lord have a responsibility to keep each other from sin, and to refuse to participate in sin together, for God will hold each accountable. The concept of submission does not extend to submitting unto sin.

c. **Great fear came upon all the church:** This is the first use of the word **church** in the Book of Acts. What is the **church**?

i. "The Greek word has both a Gentile and a Jewish background. In its Gentile sense it denotes chiefly the citizen-assembly of a Greek city . . . but it is its Jewish usage that underlies its use to denote the community of believers in Jesus. In the Septuagint it is one of the words used to denote the people of Israel in their religious character as Yahweh's 'assembly.'" (Bruce)

ii. In other words, Luke chose a term that was used in his Bible to describe the people of God in the Old Testament. It was not the only term, but certainly one of the terms.

iii. "The Christian *ekklesia* was both new and old - new, because of its relation and witness to Jesus as Lord and to the epoch-making events of his death exaltation and the sending of the Spirit; old, as the continuation of the 'congregation of the Lord' which had formerly been confined within the limits of one nation, but now, having died and risen with Christ, was to be open to all believers without distinction." (Bruce)

4. Observations on the account of Ananias and Sapphira.

a. Were Ananias and Sapphira saved? It is impossible to say for certain, for only God knows. But we can see that it is possible for a Christian to *sin unto death* (1Jn_5:16-17), and we have New Testament examples of saved Christians being judged by being “brought home” in death (1Co_11:27-32).

b. Notice that their great sin was rooted in *pride*; pride will corrupt the church more quickly than anything else.

c. In noticing the comparison between the incident of Ananias and Sapphira and Achan in the book of Joshua, it is interesting also to look at the contrasts. In Joshua, God expected the people of God themselves to execute the judgment upon the offender. But in Acts, God takes this type of judgment out of the church’s hand and executes it Himself. The church has no place in administering such punishment itself or in having civil authorities do so for them.

B. Continuing power in the church.

1. (Act_5:12) Power shown through miracles and unity.

And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch.

a. **Many signs and wonders were done . . . they were all with one accord:** Often, the fact that God’s people are together **all with one accord** is a greater display of the power of the Holy Spirit than any particular sign or wonder. Our hearts and minds can be harder to move than any mountain!

b. We can wonder why at this time God chose to do these miracles **through the hands of the apostles** and not mainly through others. But God sovereignly chooses which hands will bring a miracle. He had a purpose in doing it **through the hands of the apostles**.

c. **Solomon’s Porch:** The second temple was a massive compound, with extensive colonnades and covered areas. No doubt, the early Christians gathered together in a particular area of the temple complex, an area open to all.

2. (Act_5:13-14) The church's reputation and growth.

Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.

a. **None of the rest dared join them:** The community of Christians had a marvelous reputation for integrity, and everybody knew it was a serious thing to be a follower of Jesus. An Ananias and Sapphira incident would cut down on casual commitment!

b. **And believers were increasingly added to the Lord:** Yet, the church kept growing; though people knew it was a serious thing to be a Christian, the Spirit of God kept moving with power.

c. Notice how new believers were added: **Added to the Lord**, not to a "church" or a person or even a movement, but to God Himself.

3. (Act_5:15-16) The expectation of miracles among the early Christians.

So that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

a. **They brought the sick out into the streets:** People were so convinced of the reality and power of what the Christians believed, they thought they could be healed by the mere touch of Peter's shadow.

i. **That at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them:** Our text does not specifically say people were healed by Peter's shadow; it merely tells us people thought it would, and they took action based on this belief. We don't know for certain if people were actually healed by this.

b. Assuming people were healed, apparently, even **the shadow of Peter** became a point of contact where people

would release faith in Jesus as healer. It seems that people well understood what Peter said in Act_3:12-16 : That Jesus heals, even if He is doing His healing work through His apostles.

i. It may sound crazy that one could be healed by the touch of a shadow, but we know one was healed by the touch of a garment, when the woman touched the hem of Jesus' garment (Luk_8:44). There wasn't anything magical in the garment, but it was a way her faith was released. In the same, there was no power in Peter's shadow itself, but there was power when a person believed in Jesus to heal them, and the passing of Peter's shadow may have helped some to believe.

ii. "It may be significant that the verb *episkiazo*, which Luke chooses, meaning 'to overshadow', he has used twice in his Gospel of the overshadowing of God's presence." (Stott)

iii. "The idea that shadows had magical powers, both beneficent and malevolent, was current in the ancient world and explains the motivation of the people." (Marshall)

c. However, we can trust that Luke is not merely recording legends. "From what we know of physicians, even in those days, we cannot assume that Luke would gullibly accept stories of 'miraculous healing' without investigating them." (LaSor)

d. **They were all healed:** However God chose to bring the healing, there is no doubt that a remarkable work of healing was present. We shouldn't miss the connection between the purity preserved in the first part of the chapter (with the death of Ananias and the fear of God among the Christians) and the power displayed here. God was blessing a pure church with spiritual power.

e. When we see that **a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem**, we see that people are coming from afar to the apostles, instead of the apostles going to them. This is exciting, but not exactly according to the command of Jesus. He told the disciples to go out to

Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Act_1:8). In fact, the apostles wouldn't leave Jerusalem until they were forced to by persecution (Act_8:1; Act_12:1-2).

C. The apostles are imprisoned by the Jewish rulers.

1. (Act_5:17-18) The arrest and imprisonment of the apostles.

Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.

a. **They were filled with indignation:** The apostles, like Jesus whom they represent, are persecuted because their good works and popularity are a threat to those who have an interest in the status quo of religious and moral darkness.

2. (Act_5:19-20) Angelic intervention frees the apostles.

But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life."

a. **An angel of the Lord opened the prison doors:** Of course, this was easy for God to arrange. Angels are *all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation* (Heb_1:14). God sent forth this angel *to minister for* the apostles. Locked doors are nothing for the Lord!

b. They are not only set free, but they are set free for a purpose, that they may **Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life**. God did not set the apostles free so they could run for the hills or so they could just indulge their own comfort. They were set free for a reason.

i. Isn't this a pattern for our own lives? We are set free so that we may proclaim **all the words of this life**, instead of being set free for our own pleasure and comfort.

c. **An angel of the Lord:** Possibly, they only understood this was an angel in retrospect. Angels often come in human

appearance, and it may not always be easy to recognize an angel (Luk_24:3-7, Heb_13:2).

3. (Act_5:21-28) The apostles begin preaching again, and are arrested again by the Jewish rulers.

And when they heard *that*, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. So one came and told them, saying, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"

a. **They entered the temple early in the morning and taught:** What obedience! What boldness! They went to the most public place they could (**the temple**), and as soon as they could (**early in the morning**). When they were thought to be in the prison, they were obediently teaching God's word.

i. When the high priests and other officials found out the apostles were gone, but the prison was still shut securely, **they wondered what the outcome would be**. They might have **wondered**, but we don't - we know God's work will continue.

b. **The captain went with the officers and brought them without violence:** The apostles were soon arrested again. It would have been tempting for them to think that since they were miraculously released, that God would keep them from being arrested again, but that wasn't the case.

i. When the apostles went back into custody, they knew how easy it would be for God to release them again, if it pleased Him to do so. Their past experience of the power of God had filled them with faith for the present.

ii. **Brought them without violence:** Significantly, the apostles do not appeal to popular opinion for protection against the Jewish rulers. After all, they could have incited the crowd by shouting, "Are you going to let them take us away?" But their trust is in God and God alone. A carnal solution to their problem was available, but they did not use it.

c. **For they feared the people:** The hearts of the Jewish rulers are again exposed. They **feared the people**, but they did not fear God.

d. The accusation of the high priest is a wonderful testimony to the effectiveness of the message preached by the apostles.

The high priest himself declares they **have filled Jerusalem with** [their] **doctrine**. He also knows that they want to **bring this Man's blood** on the Jewish rulers!

i. By calling Jesus **this Man**, the Jewish leaders are obviously avoiding the name *Jesus*, but they can't avoid the power of Jesus; it is staring them right in the face.

ii. The charge that the apostles did **intend to bring this Man's blood upon us** is interesting. The high priest no doubt meant that the apostles intended to hold the Jewish leaders responsible, in some measure, for the execution of Jesus (Act_2:23). Yet, we know that the apostles must have desired for the high priest and the other Jewish leaders to come to faith in Jesus, even as some other priests

did (Act_6:7). For certain, the apostles wanted to **bring** the covering, cleansing blood of Jesus upon the high priest!

D. The resolution of their case before the Jewish rulers.

1. (Act_5:29-32) The testimony of the apostles before the Sanhedrin.

But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and *so also is* the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

a. **We ought to obey God rather than men:** This was a testimony of *great boldness*, in contrast to the Sanhedrin, who were more concerned about man’s opinion than God’s opinion.

i. The apostles’ response to the Sanhedrin is not a defense, nor is it a plea for mercy; it is a simple explanation of action.

ii. We should obey rulers, but not when they contradict God: “Therefore, if a father, being not content with his own estate, do essay to take from God the chief honour of a father, he is nothing else but a man. If a king, or ruler, or magistrate, do become so lofty that he diminisheth the honour and authority of God, he is but a man. We must also thus think of pastors.” (Calvin)

b. This was a testimony *faithful* to the foundation of the Christian faith. Peter speaks of man’s guilt (**Jesus whom you murdered**), Jesus’ death (**hanging on a tree**), Jesus’ resurrection (**Him God exalted to His right hand**), and our responsibility to respond (**to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins**).

i. Why does Peter refer to the cross as a **tree**? Because he is drawing an association from Deu_21:22-23, where it says that a person hanged from a tree is cursed by God. Peter is bringing attention to the magnitude of their

rejection of Jesus, pointing out that they killed him in the worst way possible, both from a Roman perspective (the cross) and a Jewish perspective (the **tree** association).

ii. “While *xylon* [tree] was used in antiquity and in the LXX variously for ‘a tree,’ ‘wood’ of any kind, ‘a pole,’ and various objects made of wood, including ‘a gallows,’ it is also used in the NT for the cross of Jesus.” (Longenecker) c. **We are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit:** This was a *reliable* testimony, because it is based on eyewitness testimony, which is also confirmed by God!

2. (Act_5:33-39) Gamaliel’s advice to the Sanhedrin.

When they heard *this*, they were furious and plotted to kill them. Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. And he said to them: “Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it; lest you even be found to fight against God.”

a. **They were furious:** “Luke graphically describes them as ‘being sawn asunder (in heart).” (Williams) b. **A Pharisee named Gamaliel:** This was the grandson of the esteemed Hillel, the founder of Israel’s strongest school of religion. **Gamaliel** was given the title *Rabban* (“our teacher”), which was a step above the title *Rab* (“teacher”) or *Rabbi* (“my teacher”).

i. The Mishnah says of **Gamaliel**: “Since Rabban Gamaliel the elder died there has been no more reverence for the law;

and purity and abstinence died out at the same time.”

c. Significantly, Gamaliel was a **Pharisee**. Though the Sadducees had more political power (Act_5:17), it was politically foolish for the Sadducees to ask the Romans to execute the apostles without support from the Pharisees.

d. **Some time ago Theudus rose up**: Josephus, the Jewish historian, does mention a **Theudas** who led a rebellion, but at a later point than this. It could be that Josephus had his dates mixed up or that this was a different **Theudas** (it was a common name). Josephus does describe a **Judas of Galilee** (*Antiquities*, 18.1.1,2,6 and 20.5.2) who may be the same one mentioned here.

e. **If this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it; lest you even be found to fight against God**: Gamaliel was speaking for himself and not for God. There are many movements that are considered successful in the sight of man, but are against God’s truth. Success is not the ultimate measure of truth.

i. Gamaliel was really a fence sitter. He spoke as if they should wait and see if Jesus and the apostles were really from God. But what greater testimony did he need, beyond Jesus’ resurrection and the apostles’ miracles? Why does he adopt a “wait-and-see” attitude?

ii. Gamaliel proposed the test of time, and that is an important test, but more important than the test of time is the test of eternity.

iii. “We should not be too ready to credit Gamaliel with having uttered an invariable principle . . . the Gamaliel principle is not a reliable index to what is from God and what is not.” (Stott)

3. (Act_5:40-42) After a beating, the apostles resume preaching with joy.

And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So

they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

a. **When they had called for the apostles and beaten them:** The leaders thought they would intimidate and discourage the apostles with a beating. Instead, they left **rejoicing**. They were not **rejoicing** that they suffered, but that they **were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name**. It was a privilege to be associated with Jesus in any circumstance, even to **suffer shame**.

b. **Beaten** can also be translated *skinned*; the beating they received stripped the skin off of their backs.

i. Marshall on the beating they received: "It was no soft option; people were known to die from it, even if this was exceptional. It was meant to be a serious lesson to offenders."

c. **They did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.** Whatever beating or shameful treatment the Sanhedrin gave them, it did absolutely no good. The disciples didn't stop preaching for a moment. Would we have

stopped? Is a beating or social rejection enough to get us to back down for Jesus? We need to have the apostles' courage and determination to stand firm for Jesus Christ.

i. Spurgeon spoke of this kind of bold heart: "Now, I charge every Christian here to be speaking boldly in Christ's name, according as he has opportunity, and especially to take care of this tendency of our flesh to be afraid; which leads practically to endeavours to get off easily and to save ourselves from trouble. Fear not; be brave for Christ.

Live bravely for him who died lovingly for you."

ii. Spurgeon also challenged the cowardly heart: "Yet you are a coward. Yes, put it down in English: you are a coward. If anybody called you so you would turn red in the face; and perhaps you are not a coward in reference to any

other subject. What a shameful thing it is that while you are bold about everything else you are cowardly about Jesus Christ. Brave for the world and cowardly towards Christ!"

(Act 5:2) He¹ kept back for himself part of the proceeds with his wife's knowledge; he brought² only part of it and placed it at the apostles' feet.

(Act 5:3) But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled³ your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back for yourself part of the proceeds from the sale of⁴ the land?

(Act 5:4) Before it was sold,⁵ did it not⁶ belong to you? And when it was sold, was the money⁷ not at your disposal? How have you thought up this deed in your heart?⁸ You have not lied to people⁹ but to God!"

(Act 5:5) When Ananias heard these words he collapsed and died, and great fear gripped¹⁰ all who heard about it.

(Act 5:6) So the young men came,¹¹ wrapped him up,¹² carried him out, and buried¹³ him.

(Act 5:7) After an interval of about three hours,¹⁴ his wife came in, but she did not know¹⁵ what had happened.

(Act 5:8) Peter said to her, "Tell me, were the two of you¹⁶ paid this amount¹⁷ for the land?" Sapphira¹⁸ said, "Yes, that much."

(Act 5:9) Peter then told her, "Why have you agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out!"

(Act 5:10) At once¹⁹ she collapsed at his feet and died. So when the young men came in, they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

(Act 5:11) Great²⁰ fear gripped²¹ the whole church²² and all who heard about these things.

(Act 5:12) ***The Apostles Perform Miraculous Signs and Wonders***

Now many miraculous signs²³ and wonders came about among the people through the hands of the apostles. By²⁴

common consent²⁵ they were all meeting together in Solomon's Portico.²⁶

(Act 5:13) None of the rest dared to join them,²⁷ but the people held them in high honor.²⁸

(Act 5:14) More and more believers in the Lord were added to their number,²⁹ crowds of both men and women.

(Act 5:15) Thus³⁰ they even carried the sick out into the streets, and put them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow would fall on some of them.

(Act 5:16) A crowd of people from the towns around Jerusalem³¹ also came together, bringing the sick and those troubled by unclean spirits.³² They³³ were all³⁴ being healed.

(Act 5:17) ***Further Trouble for the Apostles***

Now the high priest rose up, and all those with him (that is, the religious party of the Sadducees³⁵),³⁶ and they were filled with jealousy.³⁷

(Act 5:18) They³⁸ laid hands on³⁹ the apostles and put them in a public jail.

(Act 5:19) But during the night an angel of the Lord⁴⁰ opened⁴¹ the doors of the prison,⁴² led them out,⁴³ and said, (Act 5:20) "Go and stand in the temple courts⁴⁴ and proclaim⁴⁵ to the people all the words of this life."

(Act 5:21) When they heard this, they entered the temple courts⁴⁶ at daybreak and began teaching.⁴⁷

Now when the high priest and those who were with him arrived, they summoned the Sanhedrin⁴⁸ — that is, the whole high council⁴⁹ of the Israelites⁵⁰ — and sent to the jail to have the apostles⁵¹ brought before them.⁵²

(Act 5:22) But the officers⁵³ who came for them⁵⁴ did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported,⁵⁵

(Act 5:23) "We found the jail locked securely and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them,⁵⁶ we found no one inside."

(Act 5:24) Now when the commander⁵⁷ of the temple guard⁵⁸ and the chief priests heard this report,⁵⁹ they were greatly puzzled concerning it,⁶⁰ wondering what this could⁶¹ be.

(Act 5:25) But someone came and reported to them, "Look! The men you put in prison are standing in the temple courts⁶² and teaching⁶³ the people!"

(Act 5:26) Then the commander⁶⁴ of the temple guard⁶⁵ went with the officers⁶⁶ and brought the apostles⁶⁷ without the use of force⁶⁸

(for they were afraid of being stoned by the people).⁶⁹

(Act 5:27) When they had brought them, they stood them before the council,⁷⁰ and the high priest questioned⁷¹ them, (Act 5:28) saying, "We gave⁷² you strict orders⁷³ not to teach in this name.⁷⁴ Look,⁷⁵ you have filled Jerusalem⁷⁶ with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood⁷⁷ on us!"

(Act 5:29) But Peter and the apostles replied,⁷⁸ "We must obey⁷⁹ God rather than people.⁸⁰

(Act 5:30) The God of our forefathers⁸¹ raised up Jesus, whom you seized and killed by hanging him on a tree.⁸²

(Act 5:31) God exalted him⁸³ to his right hand as Leader⁸⁴ and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.⁸⁵

(Act 5:32) And we are witnesses of these events,⁸⁶ and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey⁸⁷ him."

(Act 5:33) Now when they heard this, they became furious⁸⁸ and wanted to execute them.⁸⁹

(Act 5:34) But a Pharisee⁹⁰ whose name was Gamaliel,⁹¹ a teacher of the law who was respected by all the people, stood up⁹² in the council⁹³ and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time.

(Act 5:35) Then he said to the council,⁹⁴ "Men of Israel,⁹⁵ pay close attention to⁹⁶ what you are about to do to these men.

(Act 5:36) For some time ago⁹⁷ Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men joined him. He⁹⁸ was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and nothing came of it.⁹⁹

(Act 5:37) After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census,¹⁰⁰ and incited people to follow him in revolt.¹⁰¹ He too was killed, and all who followed him were scattered.

(Act 5:38) So in this case I say to you, stay away from these men and leave them alone, because if this plan or this undertaking originates with people,¹⁰² it will come to nothing,¹⁰³

(Act 5:39) but if¹⁰⁴ it is from God, you will not be able to stop them, or you may even be found¹⁰⁵ fighting against God." He convinced them,¹⁰⁶

(Act 5:40) and they summoned the apostles and had them beaten.¹⁰⁷ Then¹⁰⁸ they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them.

(Act 5:41) So they left the council rejoicing because they had been considered worthy¹⁰⁹ to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.¹¹⁰

(Act 5:42) And every day both in the temple courts¹¹¹ and from house to house, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the good news¹¹² that Jesus was the Christ.¹¹³

(Act 6:1) ***The Appointment of the First Seven Deacons***

Now in those¹ days, when the disciples were growing in number,² a complaint arose on the part of the Greek-speaking Jews³

against the native Hebraic Jews,⁴ because their widows⁵ were being overlooked⁶ in the daily distribution of food.⁷

(Guzik)

Act 6:1-15

Acts 6 - THE APPOINTMENT OF DEACONS AND THE ARREST OF STEPHEN

A. The appointment of deacons.

1. (Act_6:1) A dispute about the distribution of assistance to widows.

Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

a. **There arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists:** In the Book of Acts, Satan's attacks on the church have come on many different fronts. He has attempted many forms of direct opposition and intimidation, and he has tried to corrupt the church from within. These strategies have been unsuccessful. Now Satan hopes to "divide and conquer" by raising one group in the church against another.

b. The **Hebrews** were those Jews who were more inclined to embrace Jewish culture and were mostly from Judea. The **Hellenists** were those Jews who were more inclined to embrace Greek culture and were mostly from the *Diaspora* (all over the Roman Empire).

i. For the most part, **Hebrews** tended to regard **Hellenists** as unspiritual compromisers with Greek culture, and **Hellenists** regarded **Hebrews** as holier-than-thou traditionalists. There was already a natural suspicion between the two groups, and Satan tried to take advantage of that standing suspicion.

c. **Because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution:** Apparently, some of the Hellenistic Jews believed that the widows among the Hebrew Jews were receiving better care.

i. "It is not suggested that the oversight was deliberate . . . more probably the cause was poor administration or supervision." (Stott)

ii. "In a congregation of that size, it was inevitable that someone's needs would be overlooked." (MacArthur)

iii. Satan loves to use an unintentional wrong to begin a conflict. The **Hellenists** were right in their hearts, and the

Hebrews were right in their facts. These are the perfect conditions for a church-splitting conflict!

d. **The daily distribution:** The early church took its responsibility to help support **widows** seriously because they often had no other support; but they also expected these widows to serve the church faithfully (1Ti_5:3-16).

2. (Act_6:2-4) The apostles arrange for deacons to be nominated.

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

a. **It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables:** The apostles explain that they should remain faithful to their central calling, which was **prayer and to the ministry of the word**. It would be wrong for them to spend their time administrating the practical needs of the widows.

i. They were wise in delegating these responsibilities. God has not called these apostles to be *everything* for the church. God has and will raise up others to serve in other ways.

ii. A pastor should not have his time consumed in tasks that are essentially *serving tables*. Yet there is something wrong with a pastor who considers some tasks "beneath" him.

iii. This didn't mean that the apostles considered the work of cleaning up the widow's dinner table as beneath them.

This speaks of handling the practical administration of the financial and practical details relevant to caring for the widows. "A 'table' at that time meant a place where a money changer did his collecting or exchanging of money.

The deacons were elected to oversee the distribution of monies and provisions to the needy among the fellowship."

(Ogilvie)

b. The fact that the apostles busied themselves with **prayer** and **the ministry of the word** shows how energetically they did those things and how consuming it is to preach and pray rightly.

i. The ministry is a lot of work, even apart from administrative headaches. A young man said to Donald Grey Barnhouse, "I'd give the world to be able to teach the Bible like you." Looking him straight in the eye, Dr.

Barnhouse replied: "Good, because that's exactly what it will cost you."

ii. **We will give ourselves continually to prayer:** They gave themselves to more than **the ministry of the word**. "Therefore, pastors must not think that they have so done their duty that they need to do no more when they have daily spent some time in teaching." (Calvin)

c. **Seek out from among you:** The qualifications described by the apostles describe the *character* of the men to be chosen (**of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom**). The apostles are far more concerned with the internal quality of the men than their outward appearance or image.

i. **Seven men:** Why did they choose **seven**? It may have been so that one could oversee the needs of the widows a different day of the week.

d. The idea behind **full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom** is that these men should be both *spiritually* minded and *practically* minded. This can be a hard combination to find!

e. **Whom we may appoint:** The final decision rested with the apostles. They asked the congregation to nominate the men (**seek out from among you**), but the decision really rested with the apostles. This was not an exercise of congregational government, though the apostles wisely wanted and valued the input from the congregation.

f. **Whom we may appoint over this business:** Seven men will be chosen to **serve tables**. It was simple, practical

service that they are appointed to; yet they must be well qualified for this as well, especially because of the danger of division.

i. Therefore, the men need to be **of good reputation**. They had to be men the church family felt confident in.

3. (Act_6:5-7) The selection of deacons.

And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

a. **And the saying pleased the whole multitude:** We can't say this was a good decision only because the people liked it. Yet, God was confirming the wisdom of the apostles through agreement among the people. The apostles were being led of the Lord, not popular opinion. Yet, because they were all in basic agreement, they agreed on how the Lord was leading the apostles.

b. The seven men all have Greek names, indicating that they are probably Hellenists themselves; the people (and the apostles) show great sensitivity to the offended Hellenists by appointing Hellenists to take care of the widows' distribution.

c. In this case, the people nominated the men, and the apostles approved them by laying hands on them, after praying for God's guidance and approval.

i. Why did they lay **hands on them** if all they were doing was providing for the practical needs of these widows?

Do you really have to be "spiritual" to do this kind of practical service? But practical service is spiritual service. The same Greek word is used for both *distribution* (Act_6:1) and *ministry* (Act_6:4). The idea behind the word in both places is *service*, whether in practical or spiritual ways.

ii. People should count it a privilege to serve the Lord in these basic, practical ways, instead of seeing it as an “unspiritual” burden. Apart from the cross, Jesus showed the ultimate measure of love by simply washing His disciples feet (Joh_13:1-5).

iii. Nowhere in this chapter of Acts are these men called *deacons*, but most consider they were the first to fulfill the office of deacon as described in 1Ti_3:8-13. The word *deacon* simply means “servant,” and these men were certainly servants. They could claim the same promise for faithful service that Paul specifically makes to deacons in 1Ti_3:13 : *For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

d. Considering all that could have gone wrong when Satan tried to attack through division, everyone involved deserves much credit.

i. *Those with the complaint*, the Hellenists, did the right thing: They made the need known, instead of complaining and whining, and they trusted the solution of the apostles.

ii. *Those of the other party*, the Hebrews, did the right thing: They recognized that the Hellenists had a legitimate need and they trusted the solution of the apostles.

iii. *The seven* chosen men did the right thing: They accepted the call to unglamorous service.

iv. *The apostles* did the right thing: They responded to the need without distracting themselves from their central task.

e. **And the word of God spread:** Because this situation was handled with wisdom and sensitivity to those who were offended, a potentially divisive issue was defused, and the gospel continued to go forth. Even **a great many of the priests** came to faith in Jesus.

i. Satan’s strategy failed. He tried to divide the church, and it did not work. But Satan’s second strategy also failed.

The apostles were not distracted from the focus of ministry God had for them.

B. Stephen's witness and arrest.

1. (Act_6:8-10) Stephen's witness for God.

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.

a. God did **great wonders and signs** through the apostles, but also through others like Stephen, one of the servants chosen to help the widows. Stephen was used of God because he was **full of faith and power**.

b. **Disputing with Stephen:** Stephen debated with Jews from **the Synagogue of the Freedmen**, empowered by the Holy Spirit, he shows greater wisdom (**they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke**).

i. There is no indication that Stephen, in himself, was smarter, better educated, or a better debater than these Jews.

We should attribute his upper hand in the debate to **the Spirit by which he spoke**.

ii. **Those from Cilicia:** "The mention of Cilicia suggests this may have been Paul's synagogue before he was converted. He came from Tarsus in Cilicia." (Lovett)

2. (Act_6:11-14) The opposing Jews, defeated in debate, induce false accusations against Stephen.

Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."

a. **They stirred up the people:** The opponents of Stephen could do nothing until they got popular opinion on their side.

Previously, persecution against the apostles had been limited because popular opinion was with them (Act_2:47; Act_5:26).

i. **They secretly induced men to say:** The opponents of Stephen could not win a fair fight, so they used lies and secret strategies to shape popular opinion against Stephen.

ii. Popular opinion can be easily shaped. The same crowds that praised Jesus (Luk_19:35-40) soon called for His crucifixion (Luk_23:18-23); then they loved the apostles (Act_2:47; Act_5:26) but now cry out against Stephen.

This is why we should never let popular opinion shape the vision or focus of the church, but let it rest on God's eternal Word.

iii. How did Luke know what the opponents of Stephen **secretly induced men to say**? Possibly, it was because a man named Saul of Tarsus was among the opponents, because some of them were from Paul's home region of Cilicia. Saul (who became known as Paul the apostle) may have told Luke about this incident.

b. The accusers brought their charges: **We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God . .**

. this man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law . . . Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change customs. Significantly, many of the same false accusations were leveled against Jesus (Mat_26:59-61). You are in a good place when people are treating you like they treated Jesus!

c. Why would they make such accusations? Because Stephen was clearly teaching that Jesus was greater than Moses; that Jesus was God; that Jesus was greater than the temple; that Jesus was the fulfillment of the law; and that Jesus was greater than their religious customs and traditions.

i. Of course, Stephen would never teach **against Moses and God**, but his glorification of Jesus would be twisted.

Stephen would never **speak blasphemous words against this holy place** (the temple), but he would not make it an idol as many Jews in that day did. Stephen had his words twisted, and a false accusation was brought against him.

ii. "Whatever form of words Stephen used which gave rise to the accusation that he said Jesus would destroy the temple, he certainly grasped and expounded the inner meaning of Jesus' own words." (Bruce).

d. Several commentators imply or directly state that the thrust of Stephen's message - that Jesus supersedes the temple and its localized worship - was a doctrine that the apostles themselves must have shied away from proclaiming. This is purely unwarranted speculation. The demonstrated boldness of the apostles is undeniable proof that they withheld no truth from fear that it might be too controversial.

3. (Act_6:15) Stephen's countenance when accused.

And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

a. **His face as the face of an angel:** Stephen's face did not have that mild, soft, angelic look that we see in so many paintings; nor was it a look of stern judgment and wrath. Instead, his face reflected the perfect peace and confidence of one that knows and trusts his God. His face had the same reflected glory that Moses had as he beheld God intimately.

i. "The description is of a person who is close to God and reflects some of His glory as a result of being in his presence (Exo_34:29 ff)." (Marshall)

b. **The face of an angel** also means that Stephen was at perfect peace. His face was not filled with fear or terror, because he knew his life was in God's hands and that Jesus never forsakes His people.

(Act 6:2) So the twelve⁸ called⁹ the whole group¹⁰ of the disciples together and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables.¹¹

(Act 6:3) But carefully select from among you, brothers,¹² seven¹³ men who are well-attested,¹⁴ full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge¹⁵ of this necessary task.¹⁶

(Act 6:4) But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

(Act 6:5) The¹⁷ proposal pleased the entire group, so¹⁸ they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, with¹⁹ Philip,²⁰

Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a Gentile convert to Judaism²¹ from Antioch.²²

(Act 6:6) They stood these men before the apostles, who prayed²³ and placed²⁴ their hands on them.

(Act 6:7) The word of God continued to spread,²⁵ the number of disciples in Jerusalem²⁶ increased greatly, and a large group²⁷ of priests became obedient to the faith.

(Act 6:8) ***Stephen is Arrested***

Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and miraculous signs²⁸ among the people.

(Act 6:9) But some men from the Synagogue²⁹ of the Freedmen (as it was called),³⁰ both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, as well as some from Cilicia and the province of Asia,³¹ stood up and argued with Stephen.

(Act 6:10) Yet³² they were not able to resist³³ the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.

(Act 6:11) Then they secretly instigated³⁴ some men to say, "We have heard this man³⁵ speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God."

(Act 6:12) They incited the people, the³⁶ elders, and the experts in the law;³⁷ then they approached Stephen,³⁸ seized him, and brought him before the council.³⁹

(Act 6:13) They brought forward false witnesses who said, "This man does not stop saying things against this holy place⁴⁰ and the law.⁴¹

(Act 6:14) For we have heard him saying that Jesus the Nazarene will destroy this place and change the customs⁴² that Moses handed down to us."

(Act 6:15) All⁴³ who were sitting in the council⁴⁴ looked intently at Stephen⁴⁵ and saw his face was like the face of an angel.⁴⁶

(Act 7:1) ***Stephen's Defense Before the Council***

Then the high priest said, "Are these things true?"¹

(Guzik)

Act 7:1-60

Acts 7 - STEPHEN'S SERMON TO THE SANHEDRIN

A. A survey of Israel's history during the time of the patriarchs.

1. Background: Why did Stephen preach this sermon?

a. Remember the charges brought against Stephen in Act_6:11; Act_6:13-14 : First, that he spoke *blasphemous words against Moses*, he spoke against the *law*, and spoke to change Jewish *customs*. Second, that he spoke *blasphemous words* against *God* and God's dwelling place, the temple.

b. In this sermon, Stephen gives a panorama of Old Testament history. We shouldn't think Stephen instructed the

Sanhedrin on points of Jewish history they were ignorant of. Instead, Stephen wants to emphasize some things revealed in Jewish history they may not have considered: That God has never confined Himself to one place (like the temple), and that the Jewish people have a habit of rejecting those God sends to them!

c. This really is not a *defense*. Stephen isn't interested in defending himself. He simply wants to proclaim the truth about Jesus in a way people can understand.

i. "Such a speech as this was by no means calculated to secure an acquittal before the Sanhedrin. It is rather a defense of pure Christianity as God's appointed way of worship." (Bruce)

2. (Act_7:1-8) God's promise to Abraham.

Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?" And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. And *God* gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when *Abraham* had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years. 'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.' Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so *Abraham* begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac *begot* Jacob, and Jacob *begot* the twelve patriarchs."

a. The **high priest** mentioned here was probably still Caiaphas, the same one who presided over the trial of Jesus (Mat_26:57).

b. Stephen recounts Abraham's journey from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran, then from Haran to Canaan, amounting to a

somewhat roundabout obedience to God's command. God had commanded Abraham **Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you**, and Stephen makes it clear this command came to Abraham **when he was in Mesopotamia**.

i. When Abraham lived in **the land of the Chaldeans** and received this command and promise, he did not immediately obey. First, he did not immediately go **to a land that I will show you**. Second, he did not leave his **relatives**, taking with him his father (who died in Haran) and his nephew Lot.

ii. Abraham's partial obedience did not take God's promise away. Instead, it meant the promise was on "hold" until Abram was ready to do what the Lord said. The promise didn't "progress" until Abraham left Haran and his father behind and went to the place God wanted him to go.

iii. Abraham will certainly become a giant of faith, even being the father of the believing (Gal_3:7); yet he does not start there. We will see Abraham as an example of one who grows in faith and obedience.

c. As Abraham went from Mesopotamia to Haran to Canaan, God was with him all the time. Stephen began by saying the **God of glory appeared to our father Abraham**. Stephen wants to make it clear that God appeared to Abraham, and guided Abraham, and blessed Abraham when there was no temple. Abraham didn't need the temple to be close to God.

3. (Act_7:9-16) God's faithfulness through Joseph.

"And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people. So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and

laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, *the father* of Shechem.”

a. **God was with him:** Again, Stephen is emphasizing the *spiritual* presence of God with Joseph all the time. Joseph did not need to go to the temple to be close to God. There was no temple! Instead, **God was with him** all the time.

b. Stephen mentions the story of Joseph, because he is a picture of Jesus, in that the sons of Israel rejected Joseph, who later became a “savior” (and the *only possible* savior) for them.

i. The message is plain: “You people have a habit of rejecting the saviors God sends to you. Why don’t you wake up and stop rejecting Jesus?”

c. **Seventy-five people:** How can Gen_46:27 say there were seventy all together of the family of Israel, when Stephen in Act_7:14 says it was 75? Stephen is quoting from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, which says 75. The number in the Septuagint is not wrong, just arrived at in a different way, specifically adding five more sons (or grandsons) of Joseph born in Egypt.

d. **The tomb that Abraham bought:** The only land that Abraham ever actually “possessed” in Canaan was this burial plot. The rest was received only by faith.

4. (Act_7:17-29) Israel’s rejection of Moses at his “first coming.”

“But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months. But when he was set out, Pharaoh’s daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. Now when he was forty

years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of *them* suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and *tried to* reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons."

a. Moses is the next picture of Jesus, who was favored by God from birth and miraculously preserved in childhood and was **mighty in words and deeds**.

b. **He supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand:** When Moses offered deliverance to Israel, he was rejected, and rejected with spite, with Israel denying that he had any right to be a **ruler and a judge** over them.

i. Stephen's message is plain: "You have rejected Jesus, who was like Moses yet greater than him, and you deny that Jesus has any right to be a ruler and a judge over you."

5. (Act_7:30-36) God's call of Moses, and Moses' role as **ruler and a deliverer** for Israel, who previously rejected him.

"And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. When Moses saw *it*, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, *saying*, 'I *am* the God of your fathers; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. Then the LORD said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where

you stand is holy ground. I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.” This Moses whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent *to be* a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.”

a. Even though Israel had rejected Moses and his leadership, God appointed Moses with unmistakable signs, including the burning bush in the wilderness.

b. God’s appearance to Moses at the burning bush is important to Stephen, because it shows that God’s presence is not limited to the temple. God is bigger than the temple, and Moses did not need the temple to be close to God.

6. (Act_7:37-43) Israel’s repeated rejection of Moses.

“This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’ This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us; *as for* this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: ‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices *during* forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.’”

a. Moses promised that there would come after him another **Prophet** and warned that Israel should take special care to listen to this coming **Prophet**. But just like Israel rejected Moses, so they are rejecting Jesus, who is the **Prophet** Moses spoke of.

i. How are you rejecting Jesus Christ? Have you received Him as your deliverer, as the one who can save you?

b. Moses, like Jesus, led the **congregation** of God's people, enjoyed special intimacy with God and brought forth the revelation of God.

c. **In their hearts they turned back to Egypt . . . and they made a calf in those days:** Israel continued to reject Moses, even after God had demonstrated that he was their deliverer.

i. The phrase **and rejoiced in the works of their own hands** is especially telling. One of the accusations against Stephen was that he had blasphemed the temple. It wasn't that Stephen spoke against the temple, but against the way Israel worshipped the temple of God instead of the God of the temple. Just as Israel worshipped the calf in the wilderness, so now they were worshipping **the works of their own hands**.

d. In their rejection of Moses and the God who sent him, Israel turned instead to corrupt idols, bringing upon themselves the judgment described in the passage quoted from Amo_5:25-27.

i. The idea behind **then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven** is as important as it is awesome. Paul later builds on the thought of God giving man over to his sinful desires in Rom_1:24-32.

ii. If we reject Jesus, what will we be given up to?

7. (Act_7:44-50) Even as Israel rejected God, they still had the tabernacle, and later, the temple.

"Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, which our fathers, having

received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house. However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 'Heaven *is* My throne, and earth *is* My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, or what *is* the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?'"

a. **Our fathers had the tabernacle . . . Solomon built Him a house:** Stephen's point is that the presence of the tabernacle or the temple did not keep them from rejecting God and His special messengers.

b. **However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands:** Stephen confronts their idolatry of the temple. In doing so, they tried to confine God within the temple. But God is too big to fit in any temple man could make.

i. On a more subtle level, many Christians do the same thing. It may not be the worship of a church building (though certainly that does take place from time to time), but it is the confinement of God to one place. In other words, the only place they meet God is at the church. As far as they are concerned, God is absent from the rest of their lives. God may as well only live at the church!

8. (Act 7:51-53) Stephen applies the sermon to his listeners.

"You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

a. **You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you:** One can imagine the angry whispering among the Sanhedrin as Stephen's history lesson begins to

hit home. Stephen sees this and knows that they are rejecting the One God sent again, just like before.

b. Drawing on concepts from the Old Testament, Stephen rebukes those who rejected Jesus; they are **stiff-necked** (as Israel is described in passages like Exo_32:9), and they are **uncircumcised in heart and ears** (as Israel is described in passages like Jer_9:26). In using the two phrases together, he may have in mind a passage like Deu_10:16 : *Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.*

i. Almost 20 times in the Old Testament, God calls Israel **stiff-necked**. These religious leaders are being just as their fathers were.

ii. Israel prided itself on the sign of circumcision because it separated them from the Gentiles, but Stephen was essentially saying, “you are just like the Gentiles in your rejection of the Lord.”

c. His main point was unmistakable: “As Israel was in its history, so you are today, **you now have become the betrayers and murderers.**” Israel was proud that they had received the law of God and were guardians of the law, but Stephen reminded them, “you **have not kept it.**”

9. Observations on Stephen’s message.

a. Stephen’s message is essentially twofold. First, *God is no respecter of places*. That is, though the temple was a wonderful gift from God, it was wrong to overemphasize it as “the house of God.” Second, *Israel is guilty of what they have always been guilty of: Rejecting God’s messengers.*

b. Jesus said that it is impossible for old wineskins to hold new wine (Mat_9:17). Through Stephen, the Holy Spirit is showing how the old traditions of Judaism (especially the over-emphasis on the temple) cannot contain the new wine of Christianity.

c. God used Stephen’s coming martyrdom to send the church out into the entire world, but God also used Stephen’s

message to show that there was no theological reason to prevent the gospel from going to the Gentiles.

i. The whole idea behind a permanent, stationary temple is “you come to me.” This is why Israel, though they were a light to the nations, mainly thought in terms of the world coming to *them* for salvation. Through the church, God would show a different heart: “I will come to you,” including the Gentiles.

d. The greatness of Stephen’s sermon is not only in its content, but in its courage. “He takes the sharp knife of the Word and rips up the sins of the people, laying open the inward parts of their hearts, and the secrets of their souls . . . He could not have delivered that searching address with greater fearlessness had he been assured that they would thank him for the operation; the fact that his death was certain had no other effect upon him than to make him yet more zealous.”

(Spurgeon)

B. Reaction to the sermon of Stephen.

1. (Act_7:54) They **were cut to the heart**, and convicted by the Holy Spirit. Yet the Sanhedrin reacted with rage instead of submission to the Holy Spirit.

When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth.

a. They show great anger, but who, really, are they angry with? Stephen is only the messenger. Their real anger is directed against the God they are rejecting.

b. The idea of **gnashing at him with their teeth** can’t help but remind us of the imagery of Hell. Seven different times, Jesus described Hell as a place of *weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Mat_8:12).

i. These men were prominent, successful, and appeared to be religious; yet they were rejecting God and revealing themselves as citizens of Hell.

ii. They didn’t start **gnashing** when Stephen finished his speech. “All they could do in their frenzy was to gnash with

their teeth. It was not a sudden outburst but the tense rather shows that it was prolonged.” (Gaebelin)

2. (Act_7:55-56) Stephen’s vision of Jesus.

But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

a. We are reminded again that Stephen was **full of the Holy Spirit**; this was the source of his courage, wisdom and power in preaching.

i. J.B. Phillips’ translation has insight: *Stephen, filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit*. This is how we should be filled with the Holy Spirit!

b. **Saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God**: It is difficult to describe exactly what Stephen saw. We can’t say if this was a personal vision or if some sort of “window to heaven” was opened, but going beyond the plain description of the text is pure speculation.

c. **Jesus standing at the right hand of God**: It is significant to note Jesus is **standing** here, as opposed to the more common description of Him *sitting* (Mat_26:64, Col_3:1) at the right hand of the Father.

i. Why is **Jesus standing** here? Jesus stands in solidarity with Stephen at this moment of crisis. He does not impassionately react to the problems of His people.

ii. We might also consider that Jesus is standing to give a “standing ovation” to Stephen, whose fate makes him unique among believers. Stephen is the first of all martyrs among the followers of Jesus.

iii. “Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing his servant before God.” (Bruce)

3. (Act_7:57-58) The execution of Stephen by stoning.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast *him* out of the

city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

a. When Stephen declared that he saw Jesus *standing at the right hand of God*, it was too much. The Sanhedrin react quickly, violently, and together. When Jesus, before this same body of men, declared that He would sit at the right hand of God, they had the same reaction and sealed his death as a blasphemer (Mat_26:64-66).

i. "For Stephen to suggest that the crucified Jesus stood in a position of authority at the right hand of God must have ranked as blasphemy in the thinking of those who knew that a crucified man died under the divine curse."

(Bruce)

b. **They cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord:** These were distinguished, older men acting this way! The reaction of the Sanhedrin seems extreme, but is typical of those rejecting God and lost in spiritual insanity. They wail in agony and cover their ears at the revelation of God, which they regard as blasphemy.

i. What a dangerous thing it is to be religious apart from a real relationship with Jesus Christ! This fulfills what Jesus warned about in Joh_16:2-3 : *Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.*

c. **Ran at him** uses the Greek word *hormao*. This is the same word used to describe the mad rush of the herd of swine into the sea (Mar_5:13). This was an out-of-control mob rushing at Stephen.

d. **They cast him out of the city and stoned him:** The extent of their rage is shown by their execution of Stephen, which was done without regard for Roman law, and which was performed according to traditional Jewish custom (stoning).

i. The second-century Jewish writing *Mishnah*, describes the practice of stoning: “When the trial is finished, the man convicted is brought out to be stoned . . . When ten cubits from the place of stoning they say to him, ‘Confess, for it is the custom of all about to be put to death to make confession, and every one who confesses has a share in the age to come’ . . . Four cubits from the place of stoning the criminal is stripped . . . The drop from the place of stoning was twice the height of a man. One of the witnesses pushes the criminal from behind, so that he falls face downward. He is then turned over on his back. If he dies from this fall, that is sufficient. If not, the second witness takes the stone and drops it on his heart. If this causes death, that is sufficient; if not, he is stoned by all the congregation of Israel.” (Cited in Bruce)

e. **And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul:** Saul stood there as the “supervisor” of the operation. As a member of the Sanhedrin, he had also approved of Stephen’s execution.

i. **Young man** literally means, “a man in his prime.” It certainly does not mean that Saul wasn’t old enough to be a member of the Sanhedrin. In Act_26:10, Paul says *I cast my vote against them*, and the plain implication was that he had a vote as a member of the Sanhedrin.

4. (Act_7:59-60) Stephen’s last words.

And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

a. **They stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”** His life ended in the same way it had been lived: In complete trust in God, believing that Jesus would take care of him in the life to come.

i. “The fires . . . in the olden days never made martyrs; they revealed them. No hurricane of persecution ever

creates martyrs; it reveals them. Stephen was a martyr before they stoned him. He was the first martyr to seal his testimony with his blood.” (Morgan)

b. **Lord, do not charge them with this sin:** God answered Stephen’s prayer, and used it to touch the heart of a man who energetically agreed with his stoning, though the man didn’t know the prayer was being answered. When we get to heaven, make sure to look up Stephen and thank him for every blessing brought through the ministry of Saul of Tarsus.

i. God heard Stephen’s prayer, and Paul is the evidence of it. We have no idea how greatly God can use us in our times of suffering.

ii. Augustine said, “If Stephen had not prayed, the church would not have had Paul.”

c. **Cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not charge them with this sin:** Stephen displays the same forgiving attitude that Jesus had on the cross (Luk_23:34). He asked God to forgive his accusers, and he made the promises loudly and publicly.

i. If the gospels contain that which Jesus *began* to do and to teach, they also only contain that which Jesus *began* to suffer. There is a sense in which Jesus suffers along with Stephen as he is martyred now.

d. **He fell asleep:** Tenderly, the text notes that Stephen did not “die.” Instead, he merely **fell asleep**, and woke up in a much better world.

i. If Stephen **fell asleep**, the church had to wake up. “If there had been any rose-colored optimism about quickly winning the Jewish people to their Messiah, that was gone. The Church could not expect triumph without a bloody battle.” (LaSor)

e. Stephen wasn’t a superman, but he was a man filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit. You have no idea of how greatly you can be used of God as you walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

(Act 7:2) So he replied,² "Brothers and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to our forefather³ Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he settled in Haran, (Act 7:3) and said to him, ' **Go out from your country and from your relatives, and come to the land I will show you.**'⁴ (Act 7:4) Then he went out from the country of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After his father died, God⁵ made him move⁶ to this country where you now live.

(Act 7:5) He⁷ did not give any of it to him for an inheritance,⁸ not even a foot of ground,⁹ yet God¹⁰ promised *to give it to him as his possession, and to his descendants after him*,¹¹ even though Abraham¹² as yet had no child.

(Act 7:6) But God spoke as follows: 'Your¹³ **descendants will be foreigners** ¹⁴ **in a foreign country, whose citizens will enslave them and mistreat them for four hundred years.**'¹⁵

(Act 7:7) **But I will punish** ¹⁶ **the nation they serve as slaves,**'said God, ' **and after these things they will come out of there** ¹⁷ *and worship* ¹⁸ *me in this place.*'¹⁹

(Act 7:8) Then God²⁰ gave Abraham²¹ the covenant²² of circumcision, and so he became the father of Isaac and circumcised him when he was eight days old,²³ and Isaac became the father of²⁴ Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.²⁵

(Act 7:9) The²⁶ patriarchs, because they were jealous of Joseph, sold²⁷ him into Egypt. But²⁸ God was with him,

(Act 7:10) and rescued him from all his troubles, and granted him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made²⁹ him ruler over Egypt and over all his household.

(Act 7:11) Then a famine occurred throughout³⁰ Egypt and Canaan, causing³¹ great suffering, and our³² ancestors³³ could not find food.

(Act 7:12) So when Jacob heard that there was grain³⁴ in Egypt, he sent our ancestors³⁵ there³⁶ the first time.

(Act 7:13) On their second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers again, and Joseph's family³⁷ became known to Pharaoh.

(Act 7:14) So Joseph sent a message³⁸ and invited³⁹ his father Jacob and all his relatives to come, seventy-five people⁴⁰ in all.

(Act 7:15) So Jacob went down to Egypt and died there,⁴¹ along with our ancestors,⁴²

(Act 7:16) and their bones⁴³ were later moved to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a certain sum of money⁴⁴ from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

(Act 7:17) "But as the time drew near for God to fulfill the promise he had declared to Abraham,⁴⁵ the people increased greatly in number⁴⁶ in Egypt, (Act 7:18) until ***another king who did not know about*** ⁴⁷ ***Joseph ruled*** ⁴⁸ ***over Egypt.***⁴⁹

(Act 7:19) This was the one who exploited⁵⁰ our people⁵¹ and was cruel to our ancestors,⁵² forcing them to abandon⁵³ their infants so they would die.⁵⁴

(Act 7:20) At that time Moses was born, and he was beautiful⁵⁵ to God. For⁵⁶ three months he was brought up in his father's house, (Act 7:21) and when he had been abandoned,⁵⁷ Pharaoh's daughter adopted⁵⁸ him and brought him up⁵⁹ as her own son.

(Act 7:22) So Moses was trained⁶⁰ in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful⁶¹ in his words and deeds.

(Act 7:23) But when he was about forty years old, it entered his mind⁶² to visit his fellow countrymen⁶³ the Israelites.⁶⁴

(Act 7:24) When⁶⁵ he saw one of them being hurt unfairly,⁶⁶ Moses⁶⁷ came to his defense⁶⁸ and avenged the person who was mistreated by striking down the Egyptian.

(Act 7:25) He thought his own people⁶⁹ would understand that God was delivering them⁷⁰ through him,⁷¹ but they

did not understand.⁷²

(Act 7:26) The next day Moses⁷³ saw two men⁷⁴ fighting, and tried to make peace between⁷⁵ them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why are you hurting one another?'

(Act 7:27) But the man who was unfairly hurting his neighbor pushed⁷⁶ Moses⁷⁷ aside, saying, ' **Who made** ⁷⁸
you a ruler and judge over us?

(Act 7:28) **You don't want to kill me the way you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?** '⁷⁹

(Act 7:29) When the man said this,⁸⁰ Moses fled and became a foreigner⁸¹ in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

(Act 7:30) "After⁸² forty years had passed, *an angel appeared to him in the desert* ⁸³ *of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush.*⁸⁴

(Act 7:31) When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and when he approached to investigate, there came the voice of the Lord, (Act 7:32) ' **I am the God of your forefathers,** ⁸⁵ **the God of Abraham, Isaac,** ⁸⁶ **and Jacob.**'⁸⁷ Moses began to tremble and did not dare to look more closely.⁸⁸

(Act 7:33) **But the Lord said to him, ' Take the sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.** ⁸⁹

(Act 7:34) **I have certainly seen the suffering** ⁹⁰ **of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them.** ⁹¹ **Now** ⁹² **come, I will send you to Egypt.'**⁹³

(Act 7:35) This same⁹⁴ Moses they had rejected, saying, ' **Who made you a ruler and judge?** '⁹⁵ God sent as both ruler and deliverer⁹⁶ through the hand of the angel⁹⁷ who appeared to him in the bush.

(Act 7:36) This man led them out, performing wonders and miraculous signs⁹⁸ in the land of Egypt,⁹⁹ at¹⁰⁰ the Red Sea, and in the wilderness¹⁰¹ for forty years.

(Act 7:37) This is the Moses who said to the Israelites,¹⁰² '**God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brothers.**'¹⁰³

(Act 7:38) This is the man who was in the congregation¹⁰⁴ in the wilderness¹⁰⁵ with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors,¹⁰⁶ and he¹⁰⁷ received living oracles¹⁰⁸ to give to you.¹⁰⁹

(Act 7:39) Our¹¹⁰ ancestors¹¹¹ were unwilling to obey¹¹² him, but pushed him aside¹¹³ and turned back to Egypt in their hearts, (Act 7:40) saying to Aaron, '**Make us gods who will go in front of us, for this Moses, who led us out of the land of Egypt**

114 — we do not know what has happened to him!
'¹¹⁵

(Act 7:41) At¹¹⁶ that time¹¹⁷ they made an idol in the form of a calf,¹¹⁸ brought¹¹⁹ a sacrifice to the idol, and began rejoicing¹²⁰ in the works of their hands.¹²¹

(Act 7:42) But God turned away from them and gave them over¹²² to worship the host¹²³ of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: '**It was not to me that you offered slain animals and sacrifices** ¹²⁴**forty years in the wilderness, was it,** ¹²⁵

house of Israel?

(Act 7:43) **But you took along the tabernacle** ¹²⁶**of Moloch** ¹²⁷**and the star of the** ¹²⁸**god Rephan,** ¹²⁹**the images you made to worship, but I will deport** ¹³⁰**you beyond Babylon.**'¹³¹

(Act 7:44) Our ancestors¹³² had the tabernacle¹³³ of testimony in the wilderness,¹³⁴ just as God¹³⁵ who spoke to Moses ordered him¹³⁶ to make it according to the design he had seen.

(Act 7:45) Our¹³⁷ ancestors¹³⁸ received possession of it and brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our ancestors,¹³⁹ until the time¹⁴⁰ of David.

(Act 7:46) He¹⁴¹ found favor¹⁴² with¹⁴³ God and asked that he could¹⁴⁴ find a dwelling place¹⁴⁵ for the house¹⁴⁶ of Jacob.

(Act 7:47) But Solomon built a house¹⁴⁷ for him.

(Act 7:48) Yet the Most High¹⁴⁸ does not live in houses made by human hands,¹⁴⁹ as the prophet says,

(Act 7:49) ' **Heaven is my throne,**

and earth is the footstool for my feet.

What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord,

or what is my resting place? ¹⁵⁰

(Act 7:50) **Did my hand** ¹⁵¹ **not make all these things?**
'¹⁵²

(Act 7:51) "You stubborn¹⁵³ people, with uncircumcised¹⁵⁴ hearts and ears!¹⁵⁵ You are always resisting the Holy Spirit, like your ancestors¹⁵⁶ did!

(Act 7:52) Which of the prophets did your ancestors¹⁵⁷ not persecute?¹⁵⁸ They¹⁵⁹ killed those who foretold long ago the coming of the Righteous One,¹⁶⁰ whose betrayers and murderers you have now become!¹⁶¹

(Act 7:53) You¹⁶² received the law by decrees given by angels,¹⁶³ but you did not obey¹⁶⁴ it."¹⁶⁵

(Act 7:54) **Stephen is Killed**

When they heard these things, they became furious¹⁶⁶ and ground their teeth¹⁶⁷ at him.

(Act 7:55) But Stephen,¹⁶⁸ full¹⁶⁹ of the Holy Spirit, looked intently¹⁷⁰ toward heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing¹⁷¹

at the right hand of God.

(Act 7:56) "Look!" he said.¹⁷² "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

(Act 7:57) But they covered their ears,¹⁷³ shouting out with a loud voice, and rushed at him with one intent.

(Act 7:58) When¹⁷⁴ they had driven him out of the city, they began to stone him,¹⁷⁵ and the witnesses laid their cloaks¹⁷⁶ at the feet of a young man named Saul.

(Act 7:59) They¹⁷⁷ continued to stone Stephen while he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

(Act 7:60) Then he fell¹⁷⁸ to his knees and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"¹⁷⁹ When¹⁸⁰ he had said this, he died.¹⁸¹

(Act 8:1) And Saul agreed completely with killing¹ him.

Saul Begins to Persecute the Church

Now on that day a great² persecution began³ against the church in Jerusalem,⁴ and all⁵ except the apostles were forced to scatter throughout the regions⁶ of Judea and Samaria.

(Guzik)

Act 8:1-40

Acts 8 - PHILIP AND THE SAMARITANS

A. Saul persecutes the church.

1. (Act_8:1) The church is persecuted and scatters.

Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

a. **Now Saul was consenting to his death:** In Php_3:6, Paul says of his life before Jesus that he was so zealous in his religious faith that he persecuted the church. Saul's "supervision" of the execution of Stephen was just one example of this persecution.

i. What kind of attitude did Paul persecute Christians with?

Consenting probably isn't strong enough. The idea behind the Greek word *suneudokeo* is "to approve, to be pleased with." Some people are reluctant persecutors, but Saul

wasn't one of these; he took *pleasure* in attacking Christians.

b. A great persecution arose against the church:

Stephen's death is only the beginning. The floodgates of persecution have now been opened against the Christians.

i. On Sunday, January 8, 1956, on the shores of a lonely river deep in the jungles of Ecuador, five missionaries were murdered by the natives they wanted to tell about Jesus. To many, this death seemed like a senseless tragedy.

Many could only see five young missionaries who had their careers cut short or the five widows and fatherless children. But God did an amazing work through those five men, even in their deaths, and the blessing still reverberates through people like Elisabeth Elliot - one of the five women whose husband was murdered.

ii. In the same way, Stephen's death might seem sort of meaningless at first glance. His young ministry of power and eloquence was cut abruptly short. His ministry also seemed to end in failure - no one was immediately saved, and all that came forth was more persecution against the church. But as always has been the case, the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church.

c. They were scattered throughout the regions: Now the church is forced to do what it had been reluctant to do - get the gospel out to the surrounding **regions**.

i. In Act_1:8 Jesus clearly told His followers to look beyond Jerusalem and bring the gospel to Judea, Samaria, and the whole world. But to this point, Jesus' followers hadn't done this.

ii. Was this persecution the will of God? God can and will use pressing circumstances to guide us into His will.

When everything is fine, we may have never considered going a certain course; then a crisis opens our eyes to that course. Sometimes we have to be shaken out of our comfortable state before we do what God wants us to!

2. (Act_8:2) The burial of Stephen.

And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him.

a. Seemingly, these **devout men** were Jews who were horrified at what had been done to Stephen. Perhaps this is Luke's way of showing that not *all* Jews were enemies of Christianity.

b. Since Jewish law prohibited open mourning for someone that had been executed, Luke's account that these **devout men . . . made great lamentation over him** may suggest their repentance towards God as well as their sorrow over Stephen.

3. (Act_8:3-4) Saul continues his persecution.

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.

Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

a. What did Saul do? **Made havoc** uses an ancient word that could refer to an army destroying a city or a wild animal tearing at its meat. He viciously attacked Christians, including **women**.

i. "Not only did he not spare the women, but he did not stop short of seeking - and securing - his victims' death (Act_9:1; Act_22:4; Act_26:10)." (Stott)

b. **Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word**: The end result is for the glory of God, because the persecution simply serves to spread the message. We shouldn't think that those who left Jerusalem left as formal preachers. Most were "accidental missionaries" who talked about Jesus wherever they went.

i. "The statement that they *preached the word* is misleading; the Greek expression does not necessarily mean more than *shared the good news*." (Stott)

ii. We can be just like these early Christians! We can share the good news of what Jesus has done in our lives. Most

people don't come to Jesus through a professional preacher or an evangelist; they come to Jesus through people just like us.

B. Philip preaches to the Samaritans.

1. (Act_8:5-8) Philip brings the gospel to the Samaritans.

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city.

a. **Philip**, like Stephen, was one of the men chosen to serve the church family in practical ways when the dispute regarding Hellenist widows arose (Act_6:5). He was one of those forced to flee persecution (Act_8:1), ending up in Samaria.

b. **Preached Christ to them:** After the Jews had rejected the gospel again, we see God extending the offer of salvation in Jesus out to other peoples, beginning with the Samaritans.

c. Who were the Samaritans? Six hundred years before this, the Assyrians conquered this area of northern Israel and they deported all the wealthy and middle-class Jews from the area. Then they moved in a pagan population from afar. These pagans intermarried with the lowest classes of remaining Jews in northern Israel, and from these people came the Samaritans.

i. Jews hated the Samaritans. They considered them compromising half-breeds who corrupted the worship of the true God. "There was deep-seated prejudice, amounting almost to hatred, standing between the Jews and the Samaritans." (LaSor)

ii. James and John (and the other disciples as well) once thought that the Samaritans were only good for being

torched by God's judgment (Luk_9:51-56).

iii. Jesus' experience with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) and His story about the kindness of a Samaritan (Luk_10:25-37) illustrate this point.

iv. Why did Philip preach Christ to them? Because Jesus had touched Philip, there was no room for this kind of prejudice in his heart. He wasn't a racist towards the Samaritans.

d. Philip comes presenting the gospel, with signs and wonders following as an impressive confirmation: When the people found Jesus, **there was great joy in that city!**

i. Undoubtedly, one reason there was such fruit was that Jesus had sown the seed in Samaria during His ministry (Joh_4:1-26). Now Philip is reaping the harvest.

2. (Act_8:9-13) Simon the Sorcerer believes.

But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

a. **A certain man called Simon:** This Simon had a fair degree of local fame. He was honored as one who didn't only *have* the power of God; they said of him **"This man is the great power of God."**

b. **Previously practiced sorcery:** Remember that **sorcery** in the Bible always has the connection with the occult and with drug taking. Whatever real power Simon had, it was from Satan, not God.

i. The specific wording indicates that Simon was a *magi*. In the ancient world there was a class of astronomers and scientists known as magi (Mat_2:1), but local wizards and sorcerers also took the title. They used it to prey on the ignorance and superstitions of the common people.

ii. "Ramsay describes the magi (esp. the lower sort who appealed to the widespread superstition of the ancient world) as the strongest influence that existed in that world and one that must either destroy or be destroyed by Christianity." (Williams)

c. **And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries:** The Samaritans wrongly assumed that because Simon had *real* spiritual power, it was from God; but that simply wasn't the case.

d. **Amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done:** Simon is convinced by Philip's preaching and amazing miracles, to the point where he declares belief, is baptized, and **continued with Philip**. Simon became a follower of Philip and his ministry.

3. (Act_8:14-17) The Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit as Peter and John lay hands upon them.

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

a. **They sent Peter and John to them:** When Jesus gave unto Peter (and the other apostles) the *keys of the kingdom of heaven* (Mat_16:19) it was really for this purpose. Here they are officially welcoming those (the Samaritans) who had previously been excluded from the people of God into the kingdom of God.

b. **For as yet He had fallen upon none of them:** Obviously, there was a subsequent experience with the Holy

Spirit that these Samaritan believers did not know until the apostles came and ministered to them.

c. **They laid hands on them:** Often, the empowering and filling of the Holy Spirit is received as hands are laid on a person and prayer is offered for them (Act_9:17, 1Ti_4:14, 2Ti_1:6). We should always be ready to receive whatever special graces and gifts God has to give us through the laying on of hands.

d. **They received the Holy Spirit:** We don't know exactly how this was evident. Perhaps certain spiritual gifts were manifested (1Co_12:7-10).

e. The fact that these Christians received the Holy Spirit in what seems to be a subsequent experience to their salvation has caused much controversy; there have been different explanations offered.

i. Some say they were never saved to begin with under Philip's preaching. When Peter and John came, they really trusted in Jesus and then received the Holy Spirit.

ii. Some say they were really saved, and then in a subsequent experience, they received the Holy Spirit in a pattern that believers should follow today.

iii. Some say they were really saved at Philip's preaching, yet God, in a unique move, withheld the gift of the Holy Spirit until it could be bestowed on them by Peter and John. God's purpose in this was to ensure continuity

between the church in Jerusalem and the new church in Samaria, guarding against division.

iv. Some say they were really saved and did really receive the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion, but were given special gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit at the laying on of hands by Peter and John.

f. The last option seems to best explain what happened. Whatever the Samaritans experienced, it seems to have been more than the "regular" bestowal of the Holy Spirit at salvation. This is a filling of the Holy Spirit we should always desire and seek.

4. (Act_8:18-25) Peter confronts Simon and his desire to buy the power of God.

And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

a. **That anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit:** Simon did not really desire the Holy Spirit for himself, but the ability to impart the power of the Holy Spirit to others at his will. This would give him much spiritual authority.

i. Essentially, Simon wanted to be "in charge" of the Holy Spirit! He regarded the Holy Spirit as a "power" he could use as he willed, instead of a *Person* who would rule his life. "The sin was a desire to possess spiritual power for personal ends." (Morgan)

ii. The practice of purchasing offices or influence in the church became known as *Simony*, because it is done in the same spirit as this Simon.

b. **Your money perish with you:** We must again praise Peter for his bold discernment, and realize how difficult it would have been to stand by and watch this confrontation. The tendency today would have been to say to Peter, "Hey, lighten up on Simon! Look, he's a new Christian!" or

something else. Peter was willing to tell Simon the truth in love, though it was hard for Simon and those standing by to hear it.

i. Phillips translates the phrase **your money perish with you** like this: *To hell with you and your money.*

Certainly, this is offensive to some, but it is an accurate translation.

c. Simon was definitely **poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity**. Yet Peter doesn't attempt to cast a demon of bitterness or iniquity out of him. Instead, Peter calls him to repentance (**Repent therefore**), prayer (**pray God**), and righteousness (**the thought of your heart**).

d. Simon gave every outward evidence to being saved. He expressed a belief in the preaching of Philip and was baptized (Act_8:13). We can be sure that Philip would not have baptized Simon if he didn't think he really wanted to follow Jesus.

Simon also *continued with* Philip (Act_8:13) and attended meetings of the church (Act_8:18). But when Peter says, **You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God** (Act_8:21), it is a pretty clear indication that Simon's belief was superficial and his baptism just a ceremony.

i. **In this matter** is literally "in these words" or "in this message." Simon had shown (and Peter had discernment to see) that he really had **neither part nor portion** in the message of who Jesus was and what He did to save us.

ii. Peter also made it clear that Simon was headed towards hell. That is exactly what is meant by the phrase **Your money perish with you**.

iii. "Men may come very near, they may be intellectually convinced of the supremacy of Jesus; they may even decide that they will adopt His ethical ideal; they may go so far as to determine that they will imitate the perfection of His example. But these things do not make men Christians." (Morgan)

e. What prevented Simon from coming to a genuine belief in Jesus? Probably it was pride. Before the coming of Philip and the gospel, Simon was an admired holy man in the region, and had been admired *for a long time* (Act_8:11), so much so that people declared, *This man is the great power of God* (Act_8:10). A proud person might give an outward display of faith because it is the “right” thing to do in the eyes of others, but in the secret place of their heart, they may fail to submit to Jesus Christ.

f. **Pray to the Lord for me, that none of these things come upon me:** Instead of actually humbling his own heart before God, Simon asks Peter to pray he would be spared the consequences of his sin. This shows Simon felt a true conviction of the Holy Spirit, but had not yet been willing to humble his own heart before God. Peter couldn’t humble Simon’s heart for him!

g. What must we do to have our **heart . . . right in the sight of God**? We must trust in Jesus, in who He is and what He has done to save us, with our heart. It is a private transaction, something no one can do for you, but you must do with God yourself. As bad as Simon’s case was, he could still **Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you** (Act_8:22). The door of repentance and getting the heart right with God was open to Simon if he would only take it.

i. We don’t know what became of Simon. We don’t know if he followed through on the conviction of heart evident in Act_8:24. Church tradition says he went off the deep end, and became a dangerous false teacher among the early Christians. It is possible that he did repent and get his heart right with God.

C. Philip preaches to the Ethiopian.

1. (Act_8:26-29) Philip, led by the Holy Spirit, is directed to an Ethiopian government official.

Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.”

a. We might have thought that Philip would have objected to leaving the great success of the work in Samaria to go out to the desolate desert, but God had a plan in it all. Philip was submissive to God’s plan.

b. **This is desert** means that Philip’s errand was foolish from man’s perspective, but wise in God. What could be more foolish than to leave a place of prospering ministry and go to a desert road?

i. “There were two roads from Jerusalem to Gaza, and the Spirit commands Philip to take the one that was seldom used.” (MacArthur)

ii. “If Christ is hindered, it is because some Philip is not willing to go!” (Morgan)

c. **A man of Ethiopia . . . had come to Jerusalem to worship:** On the desert road, Philip encountered an Ethiopian proselyte to Judaism returning from Jerusalem - reading the Bible!

i. **Of great authority:** The Ethiopian was undoubtedly a successful man. Yet his success obviously didn’t answer all the questions in his life. He knew he needed some real spiritual answers in his life, and he was seeking God.

ii. **Candace** was the title for certain female royalty in Ethiopia.

d. **He was reading Isaiah the prophet:** The Ethiopian was hungry for God’s Word. Typically, the scroll would have cost him a lot of money, so he would have had to really want it!

2. (Act_8:30-35) Philip preaches Jesus to the Ethiopian.

So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. The place in the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer *is* silent, so He opened not His mouth.

In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth."

So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

a. **The Spirit said to Philip:** It took real boldness for Philip to go right up to the Ethiopian's chariot and speak to him, but that is what the Holy Spirit told him to do.

i. The Ethiopian was a rich man, a man of power, and at least in some way a celebrity. Yet Philip knew he needed Jesus just as much as anyone else. Why do we fear telling "important" people about Jesus?

ii. We often shrink back from speaking boldly about Jesus, and the world lets us know we shouldn't talk about such things. But does the world shrink back from cramming its gospel down our throats? How many people are upset when all sorts of immorality and lies are forced upon believers? We should be just as bold to the world about Jesus as the world is bold to us about sin!

b. **Heard him reading the prophet Isaiah:** Philip knew at that moment that God had given him an open door, a prepared heart. Plainly, God had arranged this meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian; this is a glorious example of how God opens doors for evangelism. God wouldn't have directed Philip unless God had already arranged an open door.

i. One of our greatest jobs in preaching the gospel is to simply pray for open doors. Then, having prayed for open doors, we must keep alert to the opportunities God presents.

ii. Philip was effective as an evangelist because he knew how to flow with what the Holy Spirit wanted to do. He was truly led by the Spirit, not by his own whims and feelings.

c. **Heard him reading:** In the ancient world, it was common to read aloud. Philip knew what the Ethiopian was reading by listening as he read.

d. **Do you understand what you are reading?** It was good for the Ethiopian to be reading the Bible, but unless **understanding** was brought to him, there would be little benefit from his reading. But God had brought someone (Philip) to bring understanding.

i. **How can I, unless someone guides me?** This is the proper question of anyone who wants to understand the Bible. We should never feel bad if we need to be taught before we can understand many things.

ii. It is glorious when we come to understand the great truths of Scripture on our own, but God always has a place and a purpose for teachers in the body of Christ.

iii. How can we get more understanding from our own time in the Bible? To get anything from our Bibles, we must plunge in. Butterflies wander over the flowers in the garden and accomplish nothing, but bees plunge right down into the flower, and carry away essential food. We won't get anything if we just hover over our Bibles; we have to dive right in.

e. **I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?** Regarding this passage from Isa_53:7-8, the Jews of that day had different ways they interpreted the identity of this suffering servant. Some thought the suffering servant was the nation of Israel itself, as Israel had suffered greatly in wars, exile, and persecution.

Some thought the suffering servant was Isaiah writing about himself. Some thought the suffering servant was the Messiah, but they thought this hard to accept, because they didn't want to think of the Messiah suffering.

f. **Beginning at this Scripture:** Philip talked about more than this passage from Isaiah, but this is where he started. He started at common ground with the Ethiopian, but made his way to talking about Jesus. It was easy to talk about Jesus **beginning at this Scripture!**

g. Philip's effective preaching consisted in explaining *who Jesus was* (**like a lamb . . . preached Jesus**) and *what He has done for us* (**He was led as a sheep to the slaughter**). Explaining who Jesus is and what He has done for us is the essence of the gospel.

i. Today, too many preachers focus on what we must do for God, but the gospel begins with what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

3. (Act_8:36-40) The Ethiopian's response to the gospel and Philip's mysterious departure.

Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, *here is* water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

a. **And the Eunuch said:** The Ethiopian himself was ready to respond to the gospel. This was a work of the Holy Spirit, not a tribute to Philip's "salesmanship."

b. Philip insisted that the Ethiopian **believe with all his heart** before being baptized. In a nutshell, this describes

how we should respond to the gospel: **Believe with all [your] heart.**

i. The devil himself has the faith of the head, but he hates the truth in his heart. God wants His truth not only in our heads, but also in our hearts. We may intellectually know that Jesus died for the sins of the world, but do we know in our hearts that He died to cleanse *our* sins?

c. **I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God:** This confession of faith, taken in all that it means, is the essential belief for anyone who will come to God. We must believe in the *person* of **Jesus**, in all that He is and has done as **Christ**. We must believe that He is the Divine **Son**, and that He is the **Son of God** sent from the Father to accomplish the salvation of all those who will believe with all their hearts.

d. **See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?** This shows that the Ethiopian did in fact believe, and that he wanted to be baptized to declare his belief.

i. **Went down into the water . . . when they came up out of the water:** Clearly, Philip immersed the Ethiopian in baptism. This was not sprinkling, but immersion.

e. **The Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more . . . Philip was found at Azotus:** Suddenly, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, while the Ethiopian was still in the water where he was baptized! He was then “transported” supernaturally to the former Philistine city of **Azotus** (also known as Ashdod).

i. This is a strange, perhaps unprecedented event in the Scriptures. But a similar thing happened when the disciples’ boat came immediately to its destination (Joh_6:15-21), and a similar thing will also happen when the church is *caught up together with Him* at the rapture (1Th_4:15-18).

f. **He went on his way rejoicing:** The joy of the Ethiopian, even after Philip’s strange departure, shows that his faith was firmly rooted in God, not in Philip.

(Act 8:2) Some⁷ devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation⁸ over him.⁹

(Act 8:3) But Saul was trying to destroy¹⁰ the church; entering one house after another, he dragged off¹¹ both men and women and put them in prison.¹²

(Act 8:4) ***Philip Preaches in Samaria***

Now those who had been forced to scatter went around proclaiming the good news of the word.

(Act 8:5) Philip went down to the main city of Samaria¹³ and began proclaiming¹⁴ the Christ¹⁵ to them.

(Act 8:6) The crowds were paying attention with one mind to what Philip said,¹⁶ as they heard and saw the miraculous signs¹⁷ he was performing.

(Act 8:7) For unclean spirits,¹⁸ crying with loud shrieks, were coming out of many who were possessed,¹⁹ and many paralyzed and lame people were healed.

(Act 8:8) So there was²⁰ great joy²¹ in that city.

(Act 8:9) Now in that city was a man named Simon, who had been practicing magic²² and amazing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great.

(Act 8:10) All the people,²³ from the least to the greatest, paid close attention to him, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called 'Great.' "²⁴

(Act 8:11) And they paid close attention to him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.

(Act 8:12) But when they believed Philip as he was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God²⁵ and the name of Jesus Christ,²⁶ they began to be baptized,²⁷ both men and women.

(Act 8:13) Even Simon himself believed, and after he was baptized, he stayed close to²⁸ Philip constantly, and when he saw the signs and great miracles that were occurring, he was amazed.²⁹

(Act 8:14) Now when the apostles in Jerusalem³⁰ heard that Samaria had accepted the word³¹ of God, they sent³² Peter

and John to them.

(Act 8:15) These two³³ went down and prayed for them so that they would receive the Holy Spirit.

(Act 8:16) (For the Spirit³⁴ had not yet come upon³⁵ any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)³⁶

(Act 8:17) Then Peter and John placed their hands on the Samaritans,³⁷ and they received the Holy Spirit.³⁸

(Act 8:18) Now Simon, when he saw that the Spirit³⁹ was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, offered them money, (Act 8:19) saying, "Give me this power⁴⁰ too, so that everyone I place my hands on may receive the Holy Spirit."

(Act 8:20) But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you,⁴¹ because you thought you could acquire⁴² God's gift with money!

(Act 8:21) You have no share or part⁴³ in this matter⁴⁴ because your heart is not right before God!

(Act 8:22) Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord⁴⁵ that he may perhaps forgive you for the intent of your heart.⁴⁶

(Act 8:23) For I see that you are bitterly envious⁴⁷ and in bondage to sin."

(Act 8:24) But Simon replied,⁴⁸ "You pray to the Lord for me so that nothing of what you have said may happen to⁴⁹ me."

(Act 8:25) So after Peter and John⁵⁰ had solemnly testified⁵¹ and spoken the word of the Lord,⁵² they started back to Jerusalem, proclaiming⁵³ the good news to many Samaritan villages⁵⁴ as they went.⁵⁵

(Act 8:26) ***Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch***

Then an angel of the Lord⁵⁶ said to Philip,⁵⁷ "Get up and go south⁵⁸ on the road that goes down from Jerusalem⁵⁹ to Gaza."

(This is a desert⁶⁰ road.)⁶¹

(Act 8:27) So⁶² he got up⁶³ and went. There⁶⁴ he met⁶⁵ an Ethiopian eunuch,⁶⁶ a court official of Candace,⁶⁷ queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasury. He⁶⁸ had come to Jerusalem to worship,⁶⁹

(Act 8:28) and was returning home, sitting⁷⁰ in his chariot, reading⁷¹ the prophet Isaiah.

(Act 8:29) Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."

(Act 8:30) So Philip ran up⁷² to it⁷³ and heard the man⁷⁴ reading Isaiah the prophet. He⁷⁵ asked him,⁷⁶ "Do you understand what you're reading?"

(Act 8:31) The man⁷⁷ replied, "How in the world can I,⁷⁸ unless someone guides me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

(Act 8:32) Now the passage of scripture the man⁷⁹ was reading was this:

**" He was led like a sheep to slaughter,
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did ⁸⁰ not open his mouth.**

(Act 8:33) **In humiliation ⁸¹ justice was taken from him. ⁸²**

Who can describe his posterity? ⁸³

For his life was taken away ⁸⁴ from the earth. " ⁸⁵

(Act 8:34) Then the eunuch said⁸⁶ to Philip, "Please tell me,⁸⁷ who is the prophet saying this about — himself or someone else?"⁸⁸

(Act 8:35) So Philip started speaking,⁸⁹ and beginning with this scripture⁹⁰ proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him.

(Act 8:36) Now as they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look, there is water! What is to stop me⁹¹ from being baptized?"⁹²

(Act 8:37) (TEXT OMITTED)

(Act 8:38) So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water,⁹³ and Philip baptized⁹⁴ him.

(Act 8:39) Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any more, but⁹⁵ went on his way rejoicing.⁹⁶

(Act 8:40) Philip, however, found himself⁹⁷ at Azotus,⁹⁸ and as he passed through the area,⁹⁹ he proclaimed the good news¹⁰⁰ to all the towns¹⁰¹ until he came to Caesarea.¹⁰²

(Act 9:1) ***The Conversion of Saul***

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing out threats¹ to murder² the Lord's disciples, went to the high priest

(Guzik)

Act 9:1-43

Acts 9 - THE CONVERSION OF SAUL OF TARSUS

A. Saul on the road to Damascus.

1. (Act_9:1-2) Saul's purpose in traveling to Damascus.

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

a. **Then Saul:** We last saw Saul in Act_8:3, where it says that *he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison*. Here he continues and expands this work to the city of **Damascus**.

i. **Damascus** was 130 miles northeast of Jerusalem. This was at least a six-day journey, and Saul's willingness shows how committed he was to his cause. When God got a hold of Saul, Saul wasn't looking for Jesus!

b. **Went to the high priest:** The high priest mentioned here is Caiaphas. Recently, an urn was found in Jerusalem inscribed with the name of this high priest and positively dated to this period. These are the first physical remains

(such as bones or ashes) of a specific person mentioned in the New Testament.

c. **Still breathing threats and murder:** Saul was committed to persecuting Christians, and even after he became a Christian, he remembered his days as a persecutor. In Philippians 3, he makes mention of this background, saying he was *circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

i. In Gal_1:13, Paul adds more regarding his background: *For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.*

d. What did Saul look like? A very old apocryphal book, dating to the end of the first century, describes Paul like this: “A man of moderate stature, with crisp hair, crooked legs, blue eyes, large knit brows, and long nose, at times looking like a man, at times like an angel.” (Cited in Gaebelien)

e. **If he found any who were of the Way:** Here, Christianity is referred to as **the Way**. This seems to be the earliest “name” for the Christian movement, and a fitting one - used five times in Acts.

i. The name **the Way** means that Christianity is more than a belief or a set of opinions or doctrines. Following Jesus is a way of living as well as believing.

2. (Act_9:3-6) God meets Paul on the road to Damascus.

As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads.” So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord *said* to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

a. **Suddenly a light shone around him from heaven . .**

. and heard a voice: This spectacular event also must be regarded as unusual. God does not *normally* confront sinners with a heavenly light and an audible voice from heaven.

i. In Act_26:13 Paul reveals that this happened at mid-day, when the sun shines at its brightest; but this heavenly light was brighter than the sun could ever be.

b. **Then he fell to the ground:** Saul’s reaction was simply to fall **to the ground**. This wasn’t because of honor or reverence for God, it was simply a reaction of survival - he was terrified at the heavenly light.

c. **And heard a voice saying to him:** The rabbis of Saul’s day believed that God no longer spoke to man directly, as He did in the days of the prophets. However, they believed that one could hear the “echo” of God’s voice, what they called “the daughter of the voice of God.” Here, Saul learns that one can hear God directly!

d. **Saul, Saul:** When God repeats a name twice, it is to display deep emotion, but not necessarily anger (as in the *Martha, Martha* of Luk_10:41 and the *Jerusalem, Jerusalem* of Mat_23:37).

e. **Why are you persecuting Me?** As the heavenly light overwhelms him, Saul is confronted by the true nature of his crime: He is persecuting God, not man.

i. Saul thought that he was serving God in viciously attacking Christians, but now he discovers that he has been fighting against God.

ii. This has been sadly true through history. Men who were convinced they were doing God a favor have done much of the worst persecution and torture ever practiced.

iii. We shouldn’t only emphasize the “**Me**” in **why are you persecuting Me**; we should also notice the “**why**”

and see that Jesus is asking “**why are you persecuting Me?**” That is, “Saul, why are you doing such a futile thing?”

f. **I am Jesus:** This was all Jesus had to say for Saul to know exactly who He was, even though “Jesus” was a fairly common name. Saul knew who **Jesus** was; he had undoubtedly heard Him teach in Jerusalem and as a probable member of the Sanhedrin, Saul sat in judgment of Jesus in the trial before His crucifixion.

g. Saul responds with two of the most important questions anyone can (and must) ask. The first question is “**Who are You, Lord?**” The second question is “**Lord, what do You want me to do?**”

i. Most everyone has questions they would like to ask God. A recent Gallup Survey asked people to choose three questions they would most like to ask God. The top five responses: “Will there ever be lasting world peace?” “How can I be a better person?” “What does the future hold for my family and me?” “Will there ever be a cure for all diseases?” “Why is there suffering in the world?” It is strange that people would want to ask God these questions when they are already answered in the Bible! But they really aren’t the most important questions for us to ask.

Saul asks the right questions!

ii. **Who are You, Lord?** We must ask that question with a humble heart, and ask it to God. Jesus shows us exactly who God is, and He can answer this question. Paul spent the rest of his life wanting to know more completely the answer to this question (Php_3:10).

iii. **What do You want me to do?** Few dare to really ask God this question, but when we ask it, we must ask it with submission and determined obedience.

iv. Saul’s question was *personal*. He asked the question with a “**me**”: “**Lord, what do You want me to do?**”

We often are quite interested in what God wants others to do. But the surrendered heart asks, “Lord, what do You want *me* to do?”

h. In saying “**It is hard for you to kick against the goads**,” Jesus is giving Saul a “mini-parable.”

i. The insertion of **it is hard for you to kick against the goads** and **Lord, what do You want me to do?** in Act_9:5-6 is accurate, but not in Luke’s original text. They were added by scribes, based on Act_22:10; Act_26:14, who thought they were doing God a favor by putting it in here.

ii. A goad was a long, extremely sharp stick that was used to get an ox going the way you wanted him to when you were plowing. You would jab the hind legs of the ox with the goad until the ox cooperated.

iii. Essentially, Saul is the ox; Jesus is the farmer; Saul is dumb and stubborn - yet valuable, and potentially extremely useful to the Master’s service. Jesus is goading Saul into the right direction, and the goading causes Saul pain, but instead of submitting to Jesus, Saul is kicking against the goad - and only increasing his pain.

iv. Is it too much to say that if we will not ask these two great questions and listen to God’s answers to these questions, then we are acting like dumb oxen?

v. We may complain that God compares us to oxen, and indeed it is an unfair comparison. After all, what ox has ever rebelled against God like we have? God almost owes an apology to oxen!

i. **It is hard for you** shows the great love of Jesus. He is the one being persecuted, yet his concern is for the effect it is having on Saul. What a tender heart Jesus has!

j. The fact that Saul was **trembling and astonished** by all of this reminds us that it is not always pleasant to encounter heaven dramatically. Saul was terrified by this experience, not oozing with warm, gushy feelings.

i. In Acts 9, we are only given the briefest account of what happened here. We know more from what Paul says about this experience in Act_26:12-18, 1Co_9:1; 1Co_15:8. We also know more from what Barnabas says about Saul’s

experience in Act_9:27 and from what Ananias says about Saul's experience in Act_9:17. From these accounts, we learn that Jesus appeared to Saul personally in this blinding vision.

ii. In response to this light, Saul undoubtedly shut his eyes as tight as he could; yet, Jesus still appeared before him. After the same pattern, Jesus has often had to appear to us even though we shut our eyes.

iii. In this encounter with Jesus, Saul learned the gospel that he would preach his whole life. He insists in Gal_1:11-12, *that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

k. When Saul asks "**Lord, what do You want me to do?**" Jesus answers him only by telling what to do right at the moment.

i. This is often the character of God's direction in our lives. He directs us one step at a time instead of laying out the details of the grand plan at once.

3. (Act_9:7-9) Saul immediately after the Damascus road.

And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

a. **The men who journeyed with him stood speechless:** The experience was incomprehensible to Saul's companions, but as Saul opened his eyes (presumably shut tight in a terrified reaction to the heavenly light), he still could not see (**when his eyes were opened he saw no one**).

i. We can almost hear God saying to Saul, "You shut your eyes against My light and My Saviour. Fine! Spend a few days as blind physically as you have been blind spiritually!"

b. **And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank:** It seems that he was so shaken by the experience that he was unable to eat or drink for three days. All Saul could do was simply sit in a blind silence. This was a humbling experience, and a time when Saul must have challenged all his previous ideas about who God was and what pleased God.

i. In the **three days** of blindness and deprivation, Saul was dying to himself. It would only be after the **three days** of dying that he would be raised to new life.

B. God ministers to Saul through Ananias.

1. (Act_9:10-12) God's message to Ananias.

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. "And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

a. **To him the Lord said in a vision:** There is an entirely different character in the way God spoke to Ananias than in the way He spoke to Saul. Saul had a bold, almost violent confrontation from God, but Ananias hears the voice of God sweetly in a vision, where God calls and Ananias obediently responds. What better response could there be than **"Here I am, Lord"** ?

i. We shouldn't be surprised if unbelievers receive the word with initial resistance and questioning like Saul, and we should expect Christians to receive the word like Ananias.

b. **Arise and go:** God's instructions to Ananias are clear, but curiously, God tells Ananias about Saul's vision in Ananias' own vision!

c. **Behold, he is praying:** Paul had never really prayed before; he merely repeated formal prayers. Before, his

prayers were not spiritual, he had never prayed with Jesus as mediator, he had never prayed in Jesus' name, and his own heart was proud and far from God. He had said many prayers, but had never prayed.

d. Why **Ananias**? Was he a prominent Christian? We have no reason to believe so. Did God need to use a human agent at all in this work? Not really. God used Ananias because God loves to use people, and Ananias was a willing servant. Ananias asked Saul's question, "**Lord, what do You want me to do?**" by the way he lived his life.

e. Ananias was an ordinary man - not an apostle, a prophet, a pastor, an evangelist, an elder, or a deacon. Yet God used him especially because he was an ordinary man. If an apostle or a prominent person had ministered to Paul, people might say Paul received his gospel from a man instead of Jesus. In the same way, God *needs* to use the ordinary man - there is a special work for them to do.

2. (Act_9:13-16) God overcomes Ananias' objections.

Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.

And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

a. **Lord, I have heard from many about this man:** Certainly, Ananias had heard that this angry and violent persecutor named Saul of Tarsus was on his way from Jerusalem. The Christians of Damascus must have been anxiously preparing for the persecution to come.

b. **I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done:** Ananias' objections are perfectly logical and well-founded. However, they presume that God needs instruction, or at best, counsel. It is almost as if

Ananias is asking, “God, did you know what kind of guy this Saul is?”

c. **He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name:** God had a call for the life of Saul. At this time, God had not even revealed that calling to Saul, though He tells Ananias first.

i. God considered Saul His **chosen vessel** long before there appeared anything worthy in Saul to choose. God knew what He could make of Saul, even when Saul or Ananias didn’t know.

d. **For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake:** This is almost chilling. Saul was going to leave a life of privilege to embrace a higher call, but a call with much suffering.

3. (Act_9:17-19) Ananias prays and Saul is healed and receives the Holy Spirit.

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

a. **Brother Saul:** When Ananias laid his hands on Saul, it was not only a gesture with the spiritual meaning of bestowing the blessing of the Holy Spirit on Saul; it was also a simple gesture of love meeting the needs of a blind man who could not see the love on Ananias’ face, so he communicated it through his touch.

b. **Be filled with the Holy Spirit:** It seems that this is when Saul was actually born again. Here is where he receives the Holy Spirit and is healed from his blindness, which was spiritual blindness as much as physical blindness.

i. **Be filled:** God did an effective job of “breaking” Saul, but it wasn’t God’s intention to leave him broken. God wanted to break Saul so He could fill him and leave him filled.

ii. “It is often said that Saul was converted on the road to Damascus. Strictly speaking, this is not the fact. His conversion began in his encounter with the law but it was not accomplished until the gospel entered his heart by faith, and that did not occur on the road, but in Damascus.” (Lenski)

c. **When he had received food, he was strengthened:** Saul immediately began to be strengthened both physically and spiritually. God is concerned about both areas of need.

4. Observations on the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

a. Paul regarded his conversion experience as a pattern for all believers: *Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief . . . However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.* (1Ti_1:13; 1Ti_1:16).

b. If Paul’s conversion is a pattern, then we can share his experiences. First, Jesus must confront us with Himself, with our sin and rebellion against Him, even the sins which were done in ignorance. Then we must humbly wait for the work within us that only He can do.

c. Saul’s conversion reminds us that at its core, salvation is something God does in us. What we do is only a response to His work in us.

d. Saul’s conversion reminds us that God finds us, even when we are not looking for Him.

e. Saul’s conversion reminds us that God looks for people to cooperate in the conversion of others, even when they are not really necessary, except as a demonstration of the importance of the *family* of God.

f. Saul’s conversion reminds us that it isn’t enough that we be broken before God, though that is necessary. God’s desire

is to only use brokenness as a prelude to filling.

C. Saul's initial ministry in Damascus and Jerusalem.

1. (Act_9:20-22) Saul preaches powerfully in Damascus.

Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

a. **Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues:** Because Saul was a skilled student of the great rabbi Gamaliel, he could take advantage of the synagogue custom that invited any able Jewish man to speak on the Scriptures at synagogue meetings.

b. **He preached the Christ:** The message of Paul was all about Jesus. He knew they needed to know Jesus in truth, **that He is the Son of God.**

i. Many people think when Jesus is called **the Son of God** it is a way of saying He is *not* God, only "the son of God." But in Jesus' day, everyone knew what this title meant. To be called the "son of" something meant you were totally identified with that thing or person, and their identity was your identity. When Jesus called Himself *the Son of God*, and when others called Him that, it was understood as a clear claim to His deity.

ii. In fact, on two occasions when Jesus called Himself *the Son of God*, He was accused of blasphemy, of calling Himself God (Joh_5:17-18, Mat_26:63-65). Everybody knew what Jesus meant in calling Himself *Son of God*, and everyone knew what Saul meant when he preached that Jesus is the **Son of God.**

c. **Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name:** People were genuinely amazed at Saul's conversion; it was hard to believe just how powerfully Jesus

could change a life. Years later, Paul himself would write: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

(2Co_5:17) Paul lived that verse long before he wrote it!

d. Is it surprising Saul was serving the Lord so soon after his conversion? Not at all; that is often the *best* time to serve the Lord, and especially to tell others about Jesus. When we are newly converted, we still understand the way people who don't yet know Jesus think.

i. It is true that young Christians shouldn't hastily be put in positions of authority in the church (1Ti_3:6), but you don't need a position of authority to serve the Lord!

ii. Saul's willingness to serve the Lord was a contributing factor in the fact he *increased all the more in strength*.

As we seek to serve others, God ministers strength to us.

e. **Proving that this Jesus is the Christ:** Saul, an expert in the Old Testament, could easily see how Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Scriptures.

2. (Act_9:23-25) Saul's escape from Damascus.

Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.

a. **After many days were past:** In Gal_1:13-18, Paul elaborates on what happened during these **many days**. He describes how he went to Arabia for a period of time, and then returned to Damascus. After his return to Damascus, he went to Jerusalem. Paul spent a total of three years in Damascus and Arabia (Gal_1:18); truly these were **many days**.

i. In 2Co_11:32-33, Paul refers to this incident and mentions it happened *under Aretas the king*. This means that this escape from Damascus happened between 37 and 39 AD. So, taking into account the three years mentioned in

Gal_1:18, and that this incident happened at the end of those three years, we can surmise that Paul was converted sometime between 34 and 36 AD.

b. **The Jews plotted to kill him:** This essentially begins the *many things he must suffer for My name's sake* the Lord spoke of in Act_9:16. Saul now becomes the *persecuted* instead of the *persecutor*!

c. **But their plot became known to Saul:** If Saul would now know what it was to be persecuted for his faith, he would also know the mighty deliverance of God. Saul would enjoy divine protection until his ministry was completed before the Lord.

d. **The disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket:** Saul would indeed know divine protection in the midst of persecution, but he would also learn that God's deliverance often comes in humble ways. There is nothing triumphant about sneaking out of a city **by night** hiding in **a large basket**!

3. (Act_9:26-30) Saul with the Christians at Jerusalem.

And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

a. **He tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him:** Why would Christians in Jerusalem be so suspicious of Saul even three years after his conversion? They may have thought that Saul was part of an elaborate and extended plot; they may have wondered why he went off by himself for a while in Arabia; or just as likely, they

probably were reluctant to embrace such a dramatic conversion without seeing it with their own eyes. Simply, they **did not believe that he was a disciple**.

i. At this point, some people might turn their back on Jesus Christ. They might say, “I’ve been serving the Lord for three years, preaching Jesus Christ, enduring assassination attempts and death threats. Now you don’t want to accept me as a Christian? This is the love of Jesus? Forget it!”

ii. But Saul had a greater heart of love for Jesus and Jesus’ followers. It no doubt hurt, but he understood that the disciples in Jerusalem would long remember the Christians Saul had killed and persecuted. If the disciples in Jerusalem might lack a little in love, Saul would add a little more love to make up for it.

b. **But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles:** Thank God for people like Ananias and Barnabas, who will welcome people into the family of God with simple friendship.

i. Barnabas simply extended the love of Jesus to Saul, and as Paul would write later, *love believes all things* (1Co_13:8).

c. **He was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out:** In Gal_1:18, Paul writes that in this first trip to Jerusalem, he stayed with Peter for fifteen days. He also says that he never had an audience with *all* the apostles, seeing only Peter and James, Jesus’ brother.

i. This time with the apostles in Jerusalem was important, because it finally and certainly welcomed Saul into the family of the followers of Jesus. But Paul made a point of the limited nature of his time with the apostles in Jerusalem to show clearly that he did not receive his gospel from the other apostles. Though he was no doubt blessed and benefited from that time, he received his message by direct revelation from Jesus on the road to Damascus. Luke alludes to this when he writes that Saul, speaking to the apostles, **declared to them . . . what He had spoken to him**. The

apostles were no doubt rejoicing that they and Saul and the exact same message from Jesus!

d. **He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus . . . but they attempted to kill him:** Saul again faces persecution and assassination attempts. This will be a recurring pattern in his ministry.

e. For his own protection, the Christians in Jerusalem **sent him out to Tarsus**. Twelve years will pass in the life of Saul before he again enters into prominent ministry, being sent out as a missionary from the church at Antioch. At that time, it will also be **Barnabas** who reaches out to Saul, remembering him and loving him.

4. (Act_9:31) The health of the churches in the whole region. Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

a. Acts 9 began with a zealous man *breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord* (Act_9:1). But God was more than able to turn this terrible threat into a great blessing. Now Luke wants us to know that God's work was not only continuing, but it was strong, despite the great opposition that had come against it.

b. **Galilee:** The text of the Book of Acts tells us nothing about the establishment of churches in Galilee. We don't know who started these churches, how they did it, or all the great works of God which took place in these young churches. This reminds us that Acts is only a *partial* history of the church during this period.

c. **The churches . . . had peace:** This doesn't mean that all persecution had stopped; instead, it means that they had peace in the midst of persecution.

i. At the end of verse 31, we are at an important historical crossroads in Acts and the events of the Roman Empire.

In 37 AD, Caiaphas was replaced as high priest, first by Jonathan, then by Theophilus. In the same year, Caligula

succeeded Tiberius as Roman Emperor. Caligula was bitterly hostile against the Jews and would be assassinated four years later.

d. **The churches . . . were edified:** The word **edified** has the idea of *being built up*. The churches were growing in numbers and strength.

e. Whenever God's people are **walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit**, you may expect that they will also see their numbers **multiplied**.

i. **The fear of the Lord . . . the comfort of the Holy Spirit:** Which of these do you need more today? Of course, we need both, but which do you need more today: **The fear of the Lord** or **the comfort of the Holy Spirit**? Often, God wants the comfortable to be afflicted (gaining **the fear of the Lord**) and the afflicted to be comforted (by **the comfort of the Holy Spirit**).

D. God works miracles through the apostle Peter.

1. (Act_9:32-35) Peter heals Aeneas at Lydda.

Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all *parts of the country*, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda.

There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately. So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

a. **Peter went through all parts of the country:** The previous pattern of the apostles staying put in Jerusalem and those needing ministry coming from afar to them (as reflected in Act_5:16) is now shifting. Peter **went through all parts of the country** to do ministry, traveling the 25 miles from Jerusalem to **Lydda**.

b. **There he found a certain man:** Peter found the needy man God wanted to miraculously heal, and Peter found him as he was out ministering to others in the name of Jesus. If we will be like Peter, who **went through all parts of the**

country, then we will also find opportunities for the miraculous power of God.

c. **Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you:** Peter clearly identifies who it is doing the healing - **Jesus the Christ**. Peter is only His instrument. Jesus healed with the power of Jesus, but Peter did not heal with the power of Peter. Peter relied solely on the power of Jesus.

2. (Act_9:36-42) Dorcas from Joppa is raised from the dead. At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid *her* in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring *him* not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought *him* to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her *his* hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

a. Both the names **Dorcas** and **Tabitha** mean "deer." This woman was a beloved member of the Christian community in Joppa, because she **was full of good works and charitable deeds**.

i. Luke makes it clear that Tabitha **was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did**. Some people are **full of good works and charitable deeds**, but they are only full of them in their minds and hearts.

They don't actually do them as Tabitha did. This is why Luke adds, **which she did**.

b. Why did Peter raise Dorcas from the dead? There is no indication that anyone asked him to, and we can't say that it was Peter's custom to raise every dead believer that he saw. It must have been a response to the direct leading of the Holy Spirit.

i. Does God still do this? Can God still raise the dead? Yes, of course He can and does. But Christians today must not be gullible about unsubstantiated reports.

c. **Tabitha, arise:** Peter seems to remember the healing Jesus performed in Mar_5:38-43, when He brought the daughter of the ruler of a synagogue back to life. In that healing, Jesus said, "*Talitha, cumi.*" Peter says here (in the original language) "Tabitha cumi." Peter could hear Jesus' words in his head as he ministered.

i. Peter is simply trying to do what Jesus did. Jesus is his leader. He isn't trying to lead Jesus anymore, as he did when he told Jesus not to go the way of the cross in Mat_16:22. Now Peter is letting Jesus lead him.

d. We should remind ourselves that Dorcas was not *resurrected*; she was *resuscitated* to her old life, where she would die again.

e. The fact that the Lord raised Dorcas, yet Stephen (and later, James in Act_12:2) remained dead, reflects on God's unknowable ways. After all, it certainly seemed that Stephen and James were more important to the church than Dorcas; yet God knows what He is doing, even when we don't.

i. Dorcas wasn't raised for her own sake. She would have enjoyed heaven better! She was raised for the sake of her ministry to others, which is the same reason we have *passed from death into life* (Joh_5:24).

f. Act_9:32; Act_9:41 mention the **saints** in Lydda and Joppa; this is the first time Christians are called **saints** in Acts.

When the Bible calls Christians **saints**, the idea isn't of a super-perfect people; the idea is of a people who are *different*.

Saints are set apart from the world at large; they are distinctive.

3. (Act_9:43) Peter stays with Simon, a tanner.

So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

a. **He stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner:** For a law-keeping Jew of that time, it was strictly forbidden to associate with anyone who routinely worked with dead animals. According to the laws of that time, a tanner had to live at least 75 feet outside a village because of his ritual uncleanness.

i. "The trade of a tanner was held in such supreme contempt that if a girl was betrothed to a tanner without knowing that he followed that calling, the betrothal was void." (Morgan)

b. Because he **stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner**, we see Peter is less concerned about Jewish traditions and ceremonial notions than he was before. This work of God in Peter's heart lays groundwork for what God will do in Peter in the following chapter.

(Act 9:2) and requested letters from him to the synagogues³ in Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way,⁴ either men or women, he could bring them as prisoners⁵ to Jerusalem.⁶

(Act 9:3) As he was going along, approaching⁷ Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed⁸ around him.

(Act 9:4) He⁹ fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul,¹⁰ why are you persecuting me?"¹¹

(Act 9:5) So he said, "Who are you, Lord?" He replied, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!

(Act 9:6) But stand up¹² and enter the city and you will be told¹³ what you must do."

(Act 9:7) (Now the men¹⁴ who were traveling with him stood there speechless,¹⁵ because they heard the voice but saw no one.)¹⁶

(Act 9:8) So Saul got up from the ground, but although his eyes were open,¹⁷ he could see nothing.¹⁸ Leading him by

the hand, his companions¹⁹ brought him into Damascus.
(Act 9:9) For²⁰ three days he could not see, and he neither ate nor drank anything.²¹
(Act 9:10) Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The²² Lord²³ said to him in a vision, "Ananias," and he replied, "Here I am,²⁴ Lord."
(Act 9:11) Then the Lord told him, "Get up and go to the street called 'Straight,'²⁵ and at Judas' house look for a man from Tarsus named Saul. For he is praying, (Act 9:12) and he has seen in a vision²⁶ a man named Ananias come in and place his hands on him so that he may see again."
(Act 9:13) But Ananias replied,²⁷ "Lord, I have heard from many people²⁸ about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, (Act 9:14) and here he has authority from the chief priests to imprison²⁹ all who call on your name!"³⁰
(Act 9:15) But the Lord said to him, "Go, because this man is my chosen instrument³¹ to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel.³²
(Act 9:16) For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."³³
(Act 9:17) So Ananias departed and entered the house, placed³⁴ his hands on Saul³⁵ and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came here,³⁶ has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."³⁷
(Act 9:18) Immediately³⁸ something like scales³⁹ fell from his eyes, and he could see again. He⁴⁰ got up and was baptized, (Act 9:19) and after taking some food, his strength returned.

For several days⁴¹ he was with the disciples in Damascus, (Act 9:20) and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues,⁴² saying, "This man is the Son of God."⁴³

(Act 9:21) All⁴⁴ who heard him were amazed and were saying, "Is this not⁴⁵ the man who in Jerusalem was ravaging⁴⁶ those who call on this name, and who had come here to bring them as prisoners⁴⁷ to the chief priests?"

(Act 9:22) But Saul became more and more capable,⁴⁸ and was causing consternation⁴⁹ among the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving⁵⁰ that Jesus⁵¹ is the Christ.⁵²

(Act 9:23) ***Saul's Escape from Damascus***

Now after some days had passed, the Jews plotted⁵³ together to kill him,

(Act 9:24) but Saul learned of their plot against him.⁵⁴ They were also watching⁵⁵ the city gates⁵⁶ day and night so that they could kill him.

(Act 9:25) But his disciples took him at night and let him down through an opening⁵⁷ in the wall by lowering him in a basket.⁵⁸

(Act 9:26) ***Saul Returns to Jerusalem***

When he arrived in Jerusalem,⁵⁹ he attempted to associate⁶⁰ with the disciples, and they were all afraid of him, because they did not believe⁶¹ that he was a disciple.

(Act 9:27) But Barnabas took⁶² Saul,⁶³ brought⁶⁴ him to the apostles, and related to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, that⁶⁵ the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken out boldly⁶⁶ in the name of Jesus.

(Act 9:28) So he was staying with them, associating openly with them⁶⁷ in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

(Act 9:29) He was speaking and debating⁶⁸ with the Greek-speaking Jews,⁶⁹ but they were trying to kill him.

(Act 9:30) When the brothers found out about this, they brought him down to Caesarea⁷⁰ and sent him away to Tarsus.

(Act 9:31) Then⁷¹ the church throughout Judea, Galilee,⁷² and Samaria experienced⁷³ peace and thus was

strengthened.⁷⁴ Living⁷⁵ in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, the church⁷⁶ increased in numbers.

(Act 9:32) ***Peter Heals Aeneas***

Now⁷⁷ as Peter was traveling around from place to place,⁷⁸ he also came down to the saints who lived in Lydda.⁷⁹

(Act 9:33) He found there a man named Aeneas who had been confined to a mattress for eight years because⁸⁰ he was paralyzed.

(Act 9:34) Peter⁸¹ said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ⁸² heals you. Get up and make your own bed!"⁸³ And immediately he got up.

(Act 9:35) All⁸⁴ those who lived in Lydda⁸⁵ and Sharon⁸⁶ saw him, and they⁸⁷ turned⁸⁸ to the Lord.

(Act 9:36) ***Peter Raises Dorcas***

Now in Joppa⁸⁹ there was a disciple named Tabitha (which in translation means⁹⁰ Dorcas).⁹¹ She was continually doing good deeds and acts of charity.⁹²

(Act 9:37) At that time⁹³ she became sick⁹⁴ and died. When they had washed⁹⁵ her body,⁹⁶ they placed it in an upstairs room.

(Act 9:38) Because Lydda⁹⁷ was near Joppa, when the disciples heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Come to us without delay."⁹⁸

(Act 9:39) So Peter got up and went with them, and⁹⁹ when he arrived¹⁰⁰ they brought him to the upper room. All¹⁰¹ the widows stood beside him, crying and showing him¹⁰² the tunics¹⁰³ and other clothing¹⁰⁴ Dorcas used to make¹⁰⁵ while she was with them.

(Act 9:40) But Peter sent them all outside,¹⁰⁶ knelt down,¹⁰⁷ and prayed. Turning¹⁰⁸ to the body, he said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.¹⁰⁹

(Act 9:41) He gave¹¹⁰ her his hand and helped her get up. Then he called¹¹¹ the saints and widows and presented her alive.

(Act 9:42) This became known throughout all¹¹² Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.¹¹³

(Act 9:43) So¹¹⁴ Peter¹¹⁵ stayed many days in Joppa with a man named¹¹⁶ Simon, a tanner.¹¹⁷

(Act 10:1) ***Peter Visits Cornelius***

Now there was a man in Caesarea¹ named Cornelius, a centurion² of what was known as the Italian Cohort.³

(Guzik)

Act 10:1-48

Acts 10 - CORNELIUS, PETER, AND THE CONVERSION OF GENTILES

A. God speaks to Cornelius about Peter.

1. (Act_10:1-2) Cornelius, a Gentile who served God.

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

a. **A certain man in Caesarea:** Caesarea was a predominately Roman city on the shores of the Mediterranean in Judea.

It was the headquarters of the Roman governor of the province of Judea. Archaeologists have discovered a stone from a building in Caesarea inscribed with the name *Pontus Pilate*.

b. **Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment:** The first thing we learn about Cornelius is that he is an officer in the Roman Army. This is something that would have made him all the more hated by any patriotic Jew.

i. "Thirty-two such Italian cohorts were stationed in the different provinces of the empire. They were made up of

Italian volunteers and were considered the most loyal Roman troops.” (Lenski) Because he was such a loyal servant of the oppressors of Israel, any patriotic Jewish person of that day would have been automatically prejudiced against Cornelius.

c. Yet, Cornelius was **a devout man**; a man **who feared God, prayed to God always** and **gave alms generously** to those who were in need.

i. Cornelius was in the category of what the Jews called *God-fearers* (**one who feared God**). These were Gentiles who loved the God of Israel and were sympathetic to and supportive of the Jewish faith. Yet they stopped short of becoming full Jews in lifestyle and in circumcision.

d. Because of the way the life and heart of Cornelius is described, we can see he was a man who obviously had a real relationship with God. At the same time, he was not a part of the mainstream of Jewish life.

2. (Act_10:3-6) God sends an angel to tell Cornelius to get Peter.

About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!” And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?” So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.”

a. **About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision:** We are not told specifically that Cornelius was praying, but it was the **ninth hour** (3:00 in the afternoon). This was a customary time of prayer for Jews. Also, as Cornelius relates the incident to Peter in Act_10:30, he specifically says he was praying (*at the ninth hour I prayed in my house*).

b. **He saw clearly in a vision an angel of God:** This was not a dream, nor was it actually happening. This was a

vision that came in the “mind’s eye” of Cornelius. At the same time, it was so vivid that Cornelius would later say, *a man stood beside me in bright clothing* (Act_10:30).

c. **Send for Simon whose surname is Peter:** Probably, Cornelius didn’t even know who Peter was. But he knew that he should do what God told him to do, and he could trust that God was speaking to this **Peter** also (*He will tell you what to do*).

d. It is significant that God speaks to Cornelius so directly, even calling him by name. It is also significant that Cornelius responds with a healthy fear of the heavenly and holy (**he was afraid**). This shows that Cornelius had a real relationship with God.

e. God sent an angel in a vision to Cornelius, but He used a *man* to preach the gospel to him (**He will tell you what you must do**). “Angels may help to connect men with God’s appointed preachers, they are never allowed to do more.” (Lenski)

3. (Act_10:7-8) Cornelius obeys God’s command and sends for Peter.

And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.

B. Peter’s vision of the great sheet.

1. (Act_10:9-10) Peter on Simon the Tanner’s housetop.

The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour.

Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.

a. **As they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray:** As God was speaking to Cornelius, and as Cornelius had sent the

messengers to call Peter, God was also speaking to Peter himself.

i. Typically, this is how God operates. He speaks to several people about a matter, not just one. Then confirmation is provided, and out of the mouth of two or three witnesses, a word is established.

ii. “Two men are thirty miles apart. They must be brought together. In order that they may meet, while Joppa is busy with its trade, and Caesarea with its great shipping interests, and will know nothing of what is going on; God within the shadows keeping watch above His own, sends the angel to Caesarea, and grants the ecstatic trance in Joppa. They were thus brought together.” (Morgan)

b. In that culture, the **housetop** was normally used as a sort of “patio.” There was nothing strange about Peter going **up on the housetop to pray**.

c. **Then he became very hungry:** This often happens during prayer; distractions in our body come while we are trying to direct ourselves to God. However, God would use these very distractions to speak to Peter, as **he fell into a trance**.

2. (Act_10:11-16) Peter’s vision.

And saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

a. **All kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air:** Peter sees all sorts of kosher and un-kosher animals prominently displayed on this sheet-like background (**a great sheet**

bound at the four corners). Then, Peter hears a command: **Rise, Peter, kill and eat**.

i. When Peter *became very hungry and wanted to eat* during prayer, he no doubt regarded it as a distraction. Yet, God used it by speaking to him through a vision regarding food. His hunger may have made him pay more attention!

b. **A voice came to him**: How does God speak to us? It is rare for God to speak in an audible voice. More often, God speaks to our inner man. As a vision can be “seen” by the “mind’s eye,” even so we can “hear” the voice of God with the “mind’s ear.”

i. “God does not need sound waves to fall on an ear drum to speak to a man. When it pleases him to do so, he can speak directly to one’s mind where all sound waves are finally interpreted.” (Lovett)

c. **Rise, Peter, kill and eat**: This obviously goes against Peter’s commitment as a Jew, which was to never eat anything except kosher foods. Certainly, among the **all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air** there were non-kosher animals included.

d. **Not so, Lord!** Peter’s response is both absurd and yet typical of us. He says he says “no” to his **Lord**. The only legitimate answer to a request from our **Lord** is “yes.”

i. Peter had a bad habit of telling Jesus “no” (Mat_16:22, Joh_13:8). Compare Peter’s response to God (**Not so, Lord!**) with Cornelius’ response to God (*What is it, Lord?*). On this day, it seems that Cornelius was more responsive to God than Peter was!

ii. Peter had pretty much put God in a box of limitations, and now God was going to shake Peter up to change his thinking. He can do the same for us. “Shake yourself up a little, my brother. If you are too precise may the Lord set you on fire, and consume your bonds of red tape! If you have become so improperly proper that you cannot

commit a proper impropriety, then pray God to help you be less proper, for there are many who will never be saved by your instrumentality while you study propriety.” (Spurgeon)

iii. Peter was saved, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, and Peter had been greatly used by God. At the same time, Peter was still Peter. God wasn't using him because he was perfect, but because he was in the right direction and he was available. We often fall into the trap of thinking that we must be perfected until God can really use us.

e. God responds clearly to Peter: **What God has cleansed** (declared clean) **you must not call common** (impure, unholy, unacceptable to God).

i. In Old Testament thinking, there was the *holy* and the **common**. The *holy* was made **common** when it came into contact with something common, and could only be made *holy* again through a ritual cleansing. When something was made holy it was called *consecration*; when it was made common it was called *desecration*.

ii. At this point, Peter believes that God is speaking about food. But shortly, God will show Peter that He is really getting at another point.

f. **This was done three times**: For deep emphasis, God repeats this vision three times. Peter was to regard this as important.

3. (Act_10:17-20) God makes Peter aware of the arrival of the messengers from Cornelius.

Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them."

a. **Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant:** When the vision ended, Peter did not have it all figured out. That would come in time, and as God spoke to Peter through the visitors just arriving at his door.

b. **The Spirit said to him:** Previously, in Act_10:13; Act_10:15, it was simply said that a *voice* spoke to Peter. Now, we are told that **the Spirit** spoke to Peter. This was God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, speaking to Peter.

c. **Three men are seeking you . . . go down and go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them:** At this point, God *has not* told Peter that his visitors are Gentiles. Normally, a godly Jew like Peter would not associate like this with Gentiles. Knowing this, and knowing Peter's previous resistance (*Not so, Lord!*), God simply "surprises" Peter with the knowledge that these men are Gentiles. All Peter needs to know is that the Spirit said, **I have sent them.**

4. (Act_10:21-23) Peter goes with the messengers back to Caesarea to see Cornelius.

Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, "Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?" And they said, "Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you." Then he invited them in and lodged *them*. On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

a. **Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius:** Peter must have been shocked when he opened the door and saw two servants and a soldier (Act_10:7) at his door. He would have known immediately that they were not Jews, and he would have wondered why God told him to go with them and why God had sent them.

i. The idea that God could send and use Gentiles would have been entirely new to Peter. God is really expanding Peter's mind and heart here!

b. **To summon you to his house, and to hear words from you:** The messengers from Cornelius come with an invitation. Peter is to come to the house of Cornelius, and he wants **to hear words from you**. Of course, this was an invitation Peter couldn't pass up - or could he?

i. A Gentile - worse yet, an officer in the Roman army - wanted to hear the gospel from Peter. Peter has never done anything like this before! How will he respond?

c. **Then he invited them in and lodged them:** We can see the change in Peter's heart by the way **he invited them in and lodged them**. **Lodged them** is literally "to entertain as a guest." Peter didn't just coldly give these Gentiles visitors a room; he entertained them as welcome guests, and he did this against every custom of the Jews.

i. By entertaining these Gentile guests, Peter went against the customs and traditions of Israel, but not against God's Word. Possibly, at this very moment, God flooded Peter's heart with an understanding that though the Old Testament said God's people were not to become like their pagan neighbors, it also said God wanted His people to become a light to their neighbors who didn't know the true God.

ii. "I think angels watched that house that night, with the despised tanner a fellow-disciple, the great apostle, the three Gentiles as they lodged there." (Morgan)

d. **On the next day Peter went away with them:** Peter is reaching out in love to his Gentile neighbors, in obedience to what God has told him to do.

i. "Centuries ago another Jew had come to Joppa with a solemn message from his God, which he was commissioned to bear far hence to the Gentiles. Jonah, the prophet, took a ship from Joppa and refused obedience to the divine call." (Gaebelein)

ii. Jonah ran from God's call, thinking he could get away from the Lord, and he did not share God's heart for the lost. Peter was willing to re-examine his traditions and prejudices in light of God's word, and he shared God's heart for a lost world. Are you a Jonah or a Peter?

C. The meeting between Cornelius and Peter.

1. (Act_10:24-26) Peter comes to Cornelius' house.

And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man."

a. **Cornelius was waiting for them:** Cornelius has a lot of faith in God! He is waiting for Peter to come, knowing that since God motivated him to call Peter in the first place, God would bring the plan to completion.

i. Cornelius sends servants to get a man he has never met, come meet him, knowing only that the man is a pious Jew and by tradition would have nothing to do with a Gentile like Cornelius. Despite all that, **Cornelius was waiting for them** in faith!

b. **Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him:** Cornelius didn't know Peter, but must have thought him to be a special man of God, so **fell down at his feet and worshipped him**. This reaction was understandable, though wrong. Peter corrected Cornelius by saying, "**Stand up; I myself am also a man.**" If Cornelius should not give such reverence to Peter, neither should Peter receive it.

i. Significantly, whenever worship is offered to men or angels (Rev_19:10), it is refused. But Jesus received such worship freely (Mat_8:2; Mat_9:18; Mat_14:33; Mat_15:25; Mat_28:9). This proves that Jesus is more than a man, and greater than any angel (Luk_4:8).

ii. In the great St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, there is a huge statue of Peter, where people come and kiss the toe of the

statue. This is undue and inappropriate reverence towards any man or angel. We might almost wish that Peter would visit the cathedral named after him and set those people straight!

iii. "Peter refused both to be treated by Cornelius as if he were a god, and to treat Cornelius as if he were a dog."

(Stott)

2. (Act_10:27-29) Entering Cornelius' house, Peter explains why he came.

And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together. Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"

a. **He went in** is one of the shortest, yet most important passages of this section. Peter is actually entering the house of a Gentile, something that Jewish customs and traditions strictly prohibited. By entering a Gentile's home, Peter is showing that his heart and mind have changed, and that he has learned the lesson of the vision of the great sheet.

i. "The principle subject of this chapter is not so much the conversion of Cornelius as the conversion of Peter."

(Stott)

b. **Then he said to them:** Peter must explain why he, a godly Jew (who was also a Christian) entered a Gentile's house.

So, he explains the message he received in the vision, realizing that God wasn't only (or even primarily) talking about food in the vision (**I should not call any man common or unclean**).

i. In saying "**I should not call any man common or unclean,** " Peter understood that the vision was about people, not food. But the principle still relates to food. We understand believers are not under any obligation to keep a

kosher diet. How we eat may be better or worse from a health perspective, but it doesn't make us any more right with God.

ii. Jesus spoke of this principle: *Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart, but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?* (Mar_7:19).

iii. Paul knew this principle: *I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself* (Rom_14:14).

iv. *Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink . . . which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ* (Col_2:16-17).

v. Yet the connection between unclean persons and unclean foods was important. The idea of unkosher *food* was closely connected to the idea of unkosher *people*. "It was largely because of their lack of scruples in food matters that Gentiles were ritually unsafe people for a pious Jew to meet socially." (Bruce)

c. **Therefore I came** confirms it. If Peter had not received this vision, he would have never traveled with these Gentile messengers! God had to prepare Peter's heart with the vision before Peter would have come.

3. (Act_10:30-33) Cornelius explains why he sent for Peter.

So Cornelius said, "Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.' So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God."

a. **Cornelius, your prayer has been heard:** Cornelius was praying, and the eventual answer to his prayer was the

arrival of Peter with the gospel. So, what was Cornelius' prayer?

b. Undoubtedly, Cornelius was praying either generally to draw closer to God, or specifically that God would send the Messiah. God would answer this prayer through the gospel Peter brought to Cornelius.

c. **Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God:** Peter was living a preacher's dream. His audience is attentive and well-prepared by the Holy Spirit.

4. (Act_10:34-43) Peter's short sermon to the Gentiles at Cornelius' house.

Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ; He is Lord of all; that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."

a. **In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality** is the foundation for Peter's understanding that the gospel should now go forth to Gentiles. This statement goes completely against the prevailing Jewish thought that God

certainly did show partiality, towards the Jews and against the Gentiles. In essence, many Jews of Peter's day thought that God loved the Jews while hating the Gentiles.

i. A Jewish man would begin every day with a prayer thanking God that he was not a slave, a Gentile, or a woman.

A basic part of the Jewish religion in the days of the New Testament was an oath that promised that one would never help a Gentile under any circumstances, such as giving directions if they were asked. But it went even as far as refusing to help a Gentile woman at the time of her sorest need - when she was giving birth - because the result would only be bringing another Gentile into the world.

ii. If a Jew married a Gentile, the Jewish community would have a funeral for the Jew and consider them dead. It was thought that to even enter the house of a Gentile made a Jew unclean before God. Ancient Jewish writings tell us of a Gentile woman who came to a rabbi. She confessed that she was a sinner and asked to be admitted to the Jewish faith. "Rabbi," she said, "bring me near." The Rabbi refused and simply shut the door in her face.

iii. But the Gentiles could give as good as they got from the Jews. Gentiles despised Jews as weird traditionalists, and believed that they were evil plotters who worshipped pigs. After all, Jews refused to eat pork, so they must worship pigs!

iv. All of this changed with the spread of the gospel. Christianity was the first religion to disregard racial, cultural and national limitations.

v. When the Jews showed this kind of partiality they were not being faithful to God's heart as revealed in the Old Testament. The idea that God shows no partiality is also stated in Deu_10:17 and 2Ch_19:7 : *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.* (Deu_10:17)

b. Peter's point in saying **but in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him** is not to imply that men like Cornelius were already right with God and don't need to become Christians. Instead, the point is that they need not feel excluded from God because of their national background.

i. We often think God sees color; He only sees the heart. God does not see economic status; He only sees the heart. He doesn't see nationality or ethnic group; He only sees the heart.

c. **He is Lord of all** is a powerful phrase, showing the deity of Jesus. How could anyone say this of someone who is not God?

d. **Whom they killed by hanging on a tree . . . Him God raised up on the third day:** Notably, Peter's preaching to the Gentiles is essentially the same as his preaching to the Jews. He presents the person and work of Jesus Christ, with an emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus and our responsibility before God in light of these things.

i. Peter didn't have one sermon for one group and another sermon for another. *All* people needed to be saved by coming to a living faith in a living Jesus Christ.

e. The brief sermon concludes with an understanding of the *broadness* of God's promise of salvation: **Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.** Note it carefully: **Whoever believes!** Jew or Gentile! Black or white! Rich or poor!

f. This message had great *preparation*. Peter was prepared by the Holy Spirit, and those at Cornelius' house were prepared to hear the message Peter brought. Our blessing is greatly increased when we prepare ourselves to hear the word of God.

5. (Act_10:44-48) God-fearing Gentiles are saved, filled with the Holy Spirit, and baptized.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the

circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

a. **While Peter was still speaking these words:** Salvation came when each one of these Gentiles responded to Peter's message with believing faith in their hearts, so that they were actually saved while they listened.

i. While listening to Peter, these people made a *secret* and *invisible* transaction in their hearts with God, by setting their faith in Jesus Christ.

ii. The moment of a person's salvation isn't necessarily when they raise a hand or come forward at an evangelistic invitation. It is more likely at the moment they surrender to God and embrace Jesus in the sincerity of their hearts.

iii. Peter was willing to allow the Holy Spirit interrupt his sermon. The Holy Spirit was doing the greater work in the hearts of those listening, and Peter went with the flow. He stopped and called for their baptism.

iv. Were these the first Gentiles to be saved? Gentiles had probably received salvation in the eight years since Pentecost (Acts 2). But those Gentiles were saved as they embraced Judaism as well as Christianity. Gentiles may have received salvation before this, but they were saved as Jews, not Gentiles.

b. **The Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word . . . they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God:** Their filling with the Holy Spirit was accompanied by the demonstration of spiritual gifts. This was a filling with the Holy Spirit in two senses. First, in the sense that He indwells and abides in every believer. Second,

in the sense of a special empowering with gifts and graces from the Holy Spirit.

i. When they spoke with tongues, it was to **magnify God**, not to teach men. The audience was God, not man, as is consistent with the principle of 1Co_14:2.

c. **Those of the circumcision who believed were astonished:** The Jewish Christians present were amazed. They may have understood that God was now “starting” to love the Gentiles, but who would have thought God would fill Gentiles with the Holy Spirit in the same manner and degree as the Jews?

i. Peter makes the point clearly when he notes that they **have received the Holy Spirit just as we have**. It wasn't just that God was loving or blessing the Gentiles that **astonished** them. It was that God was loving and blessing the Gentiles just as He loved and blessed the Jews, and He did it while they were still Gentiles!

d. **He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord:** The baptism in water did not save them. Instead, their baptism recognized the salvation they had already received.

5. This entrance of Gentiles into the church was not a “new” plan, but something promised long before.

a. The Old Testament looked for the day when a light would shine in the darkness of the Gentile world: *Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.* (Isa_60:1-3)

b. God promised Abraham, and his descendants, that the blessing that came through him would extend to all nations (Gen_12:1-4). Here, we see Jesus - the greatest blessing from Abraham - extended to the nations.

c. Remember Jesus' promise of *other sheep, not of this fold* in Joh_10:16. Jesus also promised, *if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself* (Joh_12:32).

d. The first Gentile Jesus dealt with in His public ministry was a Roman centurion from Capernaum. When Jesus healed that centurion's servant, He declared *that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven* (Mat_8:5-13).

e. We should also see that Cornelius was an undoubtedly good man; yet he needed Jesus. Even good people, who are respectful towards God, still need to come to Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and put all their trust in who Jesus is and what He has done for them.

(Act 10:2) He⁴ was a devout, God-fearing man,⁵ as was all his household; he did many acts of charity for the people⁶ and prayed to God regularly.

(Act 10:3) About three o'clock one afternoon⁷ he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God⁸ who came in⁹ and said to him, "Cornelius."

(Act 10:4) Staring at him and becoming greatly afraid, Cornelius¹⁰ replied,¹¹ "What is it, Lord?" The angel¹² said to him, "Your prayers and your acts of charity¹³ have gone up as a memorial¹⁴ before God.

(Act 10:5) Now¹⁵ send men to Joppa¹⁶ and summon a man named Simon,¹⁷ who is called Peter.

(Act 10:6) This man is staying as a guest with a man named Simon, a tanner,¹⁸ whose house is by the sea."

(Act 10:7) When the angel who had spoken to him departed, Cornelius¹⁹ called two of his personal servants²⁰ and a devout soldier from among those who served him,²¹

(Act 10:8) and when he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

(Act 10:9) About noon²² the next day, while they were on their way and approaching²³ the city, Peter went up on the roof²⁴ to pray.

(Act 10:10) He became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing the meal, a trance came over him.²⁵

(Act 10:11) He²⁶ saw heaven²⁷ opened²⁸ and an object something like a large sheet²⁹ descending,³⁰ being let down to earth³¹ by its four corners.

(Act 10:12) In it³² were all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles³³ of the earth and wild birds.³⁴

(Act 10:13) Then³⁵ a voice said³⁶ to him, "Get up, Peter; slaughter³⁷ and eat!"

(Act 10:14) But Peter said, "Certainly not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything defiled and ritually unclean!"³⁸

(Act 10:15) The voice³⁹ spoke to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not consider⁴⁰ ritually unclean!"⁴¹

(Act 10:16) This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into heaven.⁴²

(Act 10:17) Now while Peter was puzzling over⁴³ what the vision he had seen could signify, the men sent by Cornelius had learned where Simon's house was⁴⁴ and approached⁴⁵ the gate.

(Act 10:18) They⁴⁶ called out to ask if Simon, known as Peter,⁴⁷ was staying there as a guest.

(Act 10:19) While Peter was still thinking seriously about⁴⁸ the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look! Three men are looking for you.

(Act 10:20) But get up,⁴⁹ go down, and accompany them without hesitation,⁵⁰ because I have sent them."

(Act 10:21) So Peter went down⁵¹ to the men and said, "Here I am,⁵² the person you're looking for. Why have you come?"

(Act 10:22) They said, "Cornelius the centurion,⁵³ a righteous⁵⁴ and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation,⁵⁵ was directed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear a message⁵⁶ from you."

(Act 10:23) So Peter⁵⁷ invited them in and entertained them as guests.

On the next day he got up and set out⁵⁸ with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa⁵⁹ accompanied him.

(Act 10:24) The following day⁶⁰ he entered Caesarea.⁶¹ Now Cornelius was waiting anxiously⁶² for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.

(Act 10:25) So when⁶³ Peter came in, Cornelius met⁶⁴ him, fell⁶⁵ at his feet, and worshiped⁶⁶ him.

(Act 10:26) But Peter helped him up,⁶⁷ saying, "Stand up. I too am a mere mortal."⁶⁸

(Act 10:27) Peter⁶⁹ continued talking with him as he went in, and he found many people gathered together.⁷⁰

(Act 10:28) He said to them, "You know that⁷¹ it is unlawful⁷² for a Jew⁷³ to associate with or visit a Gentile,⁷⁴ yet God has shown me that I should call no person⁷⁵ defiled or ritually unclean.⁷⁶

(Act 10:29) Therefore when you sent for me,⁷⁷ I came without any objection. Now may I ask why⁷⁸ you sent for me?"

(Act 10:30) Cornelius⁷⁹ replied,⁸⁰ "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock in the afternoon,⁸¹ I was praying in my house, and suddenly⁸² a man in shining clothing stood before me (Act 10:31) and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your acts of charity⁸³ have been remembered before God.⁸⁴

(Act 10:32) Therefore send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is called Peter. This man is staying as a guest in the house of Simon the tanner,⁸⁵ by the sea.'

(Act 10:33) Therefore I sent for you at once, and you were kind enough to come.⁸⁶ So now we are all here in the presence of God⁸⁷ to listen⁸⁸ to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us."⁸⁹

(Act 10:34) Then Peter started speaking:⁹⁰ "I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism in dealing with people,⁹¹

(Act 10:35) but in every nation⁹² the person who fears him⁹³ and does what is right⁹⁴ is welcomed before him.

(Act 10:36) You know⁹⁵ the message⁹⁶ he sent to the people⁹⁷ of Israel, proclaiming the good news of peace⁹⁸ through⁹⁹ Jesus Christ¹⁰⁰ (he is Lord¹⁰¹ of all) — (Act 10:37) you know what happened throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John announced:¹⁰²

(Act 10:38) with respect to Jesus from Nazareth,¹⁰³ that¹⁰⁴ God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power. He¹⁰⁵ went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil,¹⁰⁶ because God was with him.¹⁰⁷

(Act 10:39) We¹⁰⁸ are witnesses of all the things he did both in Judea¹⁰⁹ and in Jerusalem.¹¹⁰ They¹¹¹ killed him by hanging him on a tree,¹¹²

(Act 10:40) but¹¹³ God raised him up on the third day and caused him to be seen,¹¹⁴

(Act 10:41) not by all the people, but by us, the witnesses God had already chosen,¹¹⁵ who ate and drank¹¹⁶ with him after he rose from the dead.

(Act 10:42) He¹¹⁷ commanded us to preach to the people and to warn¹¹⁸ them¹¹⁹ that he is the one¹²⁰ appointed¹²¹ by God as judge¹²² of the living and the dead.

(Act 10:43) About him all the prophets testify,¹²³ that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins¹²⁴ through his name."

(Act 10:44) ***The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit***

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on¹²⁵ all those who heard the message.¹²⁶

(Act 10:45) The¹²⁷ circumcised believers¹²⁸ who had accompanied Peter were greatly astonished¹²⁹ that¹³⁰ the

gift of the Holy Spirit¹³¹ had been poured out¹³² even on the Gentiles, (Act 10:46) for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising¹³³ God. Then Peter said, (Act 10:47) "No one can withhold the water for these people to be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did,¹³⁴ can he?"¹³⁵

(Act 10:48) So he gave orders to have them baptized¹³⁶ in the name of Jesus Christ.¹³⁷ Then they asked him to stay for several days.

(Act 11:1) ***Peter Defends His Actions to the Jerusalem Church***

Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles too had accepted¹ the word of God.²

(Guzik)

Act 11:1-30

Acts 11 - DEFENDING MINISTRY TO THE GENTILES

A. A controversy in Jerusalem regarding ministry to the Gentiles.

1. (Act_11:1-3) Peter hears objections to his association with Gentiles.

Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

a. **Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God:** The greatness of the work among the Gentiles in Caesarea could not be kept hidden. Besides, there was no desire to hide it, even though many Jewish Christians (**those of the circumcision**) would be confused and offended.

b. **"You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!"** The charges against Peter are simple: "You, who are supposed to be a faithful Jew, associated with and even ate

with Gentiles!” This offended these Christian Jews, so they **contended** with Peter.

i. We must remember that sharing a meal together was a special sign of fellowship in that culture. This was considered to be a significant compromise by these Jewish Christians.

c. When we see what the reaction of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem was to what Peter did, we can see how wise it was of Peter to take six witnesses with him to Caesarea and his meeting with Cornelius (Act_10:23; Act_11:12).

2. (Act_11:4-15) Peter explains his ministry to the Gentiles.

But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying: “I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But I said, ‘Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.’ But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common.’ Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven. At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.”

a. **Peter explained it to them in order from the beginning:** This account is an obvious condensation from

Act_10:9-43. God is emphasizing the importance of these events by repeating the story.

b. **What God has cleansed you must not call common:**

At first, Peter thought God was speaking about food. But Peter came to understand the vision of the sheet and kosher and unkosher animals has to do with people, not food (Act_10:28). There is a sense in which the sheet represents the church, having both “kosher” (Jews) and “unkosher” (Gentiles) on it, with no distinction.

c. The conclusion is important: **The Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning** shows that God’s stamp of approval was on this ministry to the Gentiles. How could these believing Jews withhold their approval when God had given His?

3. (Act_11:16-18) Peter interprets these events by remembering the words of Jesus.

“Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave us* when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.”

a. **If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?** If God was moving ministry out to the Gentiles, who is Peter that he **could withstand God**? Peter recognized the importance of sensing where God is going and heading that same direction, instead of trying to persuade God to go *your* direction.

i. It is important also to note these Christians would see this was all in accord with the Scriptures. They had both the **word of the Lord** Jesus, recorded in Mar_1:8, and the Old

Testament promise that Gentiles would come to the Lord through the Messiah (in passages such as Isa_49:6).

ii. There are many today who look at some work or another and say, “look what God is doing.” But activity alone isn’t enough to validate a work of God. It must also be in line with God’s Word. This work among the Gentiles passed both tests.

b. **They became silent:** The Jewish believers in Jerusalem first react with a stunned silence. But then **they glorified God**, because they saw He was now working among the Gentiles also!

i. This is a powerful passage, demonstrating that the hearts of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were soft enough to be guided by God. It is a glorious thing when God’s people will allow their prejudices and traditions to be overcome by God’s Word and God’s work.

ii. The church in Jerusalem embraced these Gentile believers at first, but it would be a long time until all the objections were answered.

B. The Church in Antioch.

1. (Act_11:19-21) The church in Antioch grows as Gentiles turn to the Lord.

Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.

a. **Preaching the word to no one by the Jews only:** At first, Christians scattered over the Roman Empire preached only to Jews. But they eventually began to preach Jesus Christ to Gentiles as well.

b. **Some of them were from Cyprus and Cyrene . . . spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus:** These unnamed disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene are

genuine heroes. They began the first mentioned “mission to the Gentiles”

(here called **Hellenists**) in Antioch.

i. In Antioch, we have the first example of Christians deliberately targeting Gentiles for evangelism, and this effort had great results.

c. **When they had come to Antioch:** Antioch was founded about 300 BC by Seleucus I, one of the inheritors of Alexander the Great’s empire. He had a thing about founding cities and naming them after his father, Antioch, and he did this about fifteen times. This city of Antioch was called “Syrian Antioch” or “Antioch on the Orantes.” Back then it was a city of more than half a million; today it is a Turkish city with a population of about 3,500.

i. Antioch was considered by many the third greatest city in the Empire, behind Rome and Alexandria. The city of Antioch was known for its sophistication and culture, but also for its immorality.

ii. “The city’s reputation for moral laxity was enhanced by the cult of Artemis and Apollo at Daphne, five miles distant, where the ancient Syrian worship of Astarte and her consort, with its ritual prostitution, was carried on.”

(Bruce)

d. **And the hand of the Lord was with them:** Because God was with them, their ministry was blessed and multiplied, the result was that **a great number believed and turned to the Lord.**

i. A ministry can’t turn people to the Lord unless **the hand of the Lord** is with them. You can turn people to a personality without **the hand of the Lord**; you can turn people to a social club without **the hand of the Lord**; you can turn people to a church or an institution without **the hand of the Lord**. But you can’t turn people **to the Lord** without **the hand of the Lord**.

2. (Act_11:22-24) The ministry of Barnabas in Antioch.

Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

a. **They sent out Barnabas:** The church in Jerusalem sends an able man in Barnabas, previously known for his generosity (Act_4:36-37) and his warm acceptance of Saul of Tarsus after he was converted (Act_9:26-28).

b. **When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad:** At the church in Antioch, when Barnabas **had seen the grace of God, he was glad**. Can people see **the grace of God** at our church? Or do they see a legal relationship with God?

c. **Encouraged them with all purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord:** Barnabas rightly focuses on his main job as a leader of the congregation. He strengthened the church family itself, with the result that **a great many people were added to the Lord**.

i. This is the plan for church growth spoken of in Eph_4:11-16. Leaders in the church dedicate themselves to building strong, healthy Christians. As the saints are equipped for the work of the ministry, they grow into maturity, and do their ministry, and it *causes growth of the body*.

3. (Act_11:25-26) Barnabas and Saul work together in Antioch.

Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

a. **Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul:** Barnabas remembers this precious brother Saul, and how he

had been sent out to Tarsus for his own protection (Act_9:28-30). Now Barnabas goes and finds him.

i. **To seek Saul** is more literally *to hunt him up*; Barnabas had to do some looking. MacArthur says the original word “suggests a laborious search on Barnabas’ part.”

b. **So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people.**

Together, Barnabas and Saul **taught a great many people**, making the church in Antioch strong.

i. Saul had spent some twelve years in Tarsus since we last met him; these years were not “wasted” or “lost,” but spent in quiet ministry and preparation for future service.

c. **The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch:** How did the name *Christian* ever become associated with the followers of Jesus?

i. The ending *ian* meant “the party of.” A *Christ-ian* was “of the party of Jesus.” **Christians** is sort of like saying “Jesus-ites,” or “Jesus People,” those of the group associated with Jesus Christ.

ii. Also, soldiers under particular generals in the Roman army would identify themselves by their general’s name by adding *ian* to the end. A soldier under Caesar would call himself a *Caesarian*. Soldiers under Jesus Christ could be called **Christians**.

iii. In Antioch, they probably first used the term **Christians** to mock the followers of Jesus. “Antioch was famous for its readiness to jeer and call names; it was known by its witty epigrams.” (Gaebelein) But as the people of Antioch called the followers of Jesus the “Jesus People,” the believers appreciated the title so much that it stuck.

iv. Christians must be willing to take the title “Jesus People,” and must also be worthy of the name. Instead of claiming any other title - Roman Catholic, Protestant, charismatic, whatever - we should be just plain **Christians**.

v. Eusebius, the famous early church historian, describes a believer named Sanctus from Lyons, France, who was

tortured for Jesus. As they tortured him cruelly, they hoped to get him to say something evil or blasphemous.

They asked his name, and he would only reply, "I am a Christian." "What nation do you belong to?" He would answer, "I am a Christian." "What city do you live in?" "I am a Christian." His questioners began to get angry: "Are you a slave or a free man?" "I am a Christian" was the only reply. No matter what they asked about him, he would only answer, "I am a Christian." This made his torturers all the more determined to break him, but they could not, and he died with the words "I am a Christian" on his lips. (Eusebius, *Church History*) 4. (Act_11:27-30) A prophetic word announces a famine.

And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar.

Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

a. **Showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar:** We don't know exactly how Agabus **showed by the Spirit** this famine was on the way. But the Christians took the word seriously, and generously begin preparations to meet the needs.

i. "We know from other sources that Claudius's principate was marked by a succession of bad harvests and consequent scarcity in various parts of the empire - in Rome, Greece, and Egypt as well as in Judaea." (Bruce) b. You can tell these are truly **disciples** and *Christians*, because they gave generously to meet the need. They gave, **each according to his ability**.

i. We also see they **determined** to give. If a person does not *determine* to give, they often never do.

c. **Sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul:** The high regard that Barnabas and Saul had among all is evident by the fact that they were trusted with the relief fund.

(Act 11:2) So when Peter went up to Jerusalem,³ the circumcised believers⁴ took issue with⁵ him,

(Act 11:3) saying, "You went to⁶ uncircumcised men and shared a meal with⁷ them."

(Act 11:4) But Peter began and explained it to them point by point,⁸ saying,

(Act 11:5) "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision,⁹ an object something like a large sheet descending,¹⁰ being let down from heaven¹¹ by its four corners, and it came to me.

(Act 11:6) As I stared¹² I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild animals, reptiles,¹³ and wild birds.¹⁴

(Act 11:7) I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; slaughter¹⁵ and eat!'

(Act 11:8) But I said, 'Certainly not, Lord, for nothing defiled or ritually unclean¹⁶ has ever entered my mouth!'

(Act 11:9) But the voice replied a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not consider¹⁷ ritually unclean!'

(Act 11:10) This happened three times, and then everything was pulled up to heaven again.

(Act 11:11) At that very moment,¹⁸ three men sent to me from Caesarea¹⁹ approached²⁰ the house where we were staying.²¹

(Act 11:12) The Spirit told me to accompany them without hesitation. These six brothers²² also went with me, and we entered the man's house.

(Act 11:13) He informed us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and

summon Simon, who is called Peter, (Act 11:14) who will speak a message²³ to you by which you and your entire household will be saved.'

(Act 11:15) Then as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on²⁴ them just as he did²⁵ on us at the beginning.²⁶

(Act 11:16) And I remembered the word of the Lord,²⁷ as he used to say,²⁸ 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'²⁹

(Act 11:17) Therefore if God³⁰ gave them the same gift³¹ as he also gave us after believing³² in the Lord Jesus Christ,³³ who was I to hinder³⁴ God?"

(Act 11:18) When they heard this,³⁵ they ceased their objections³⁶ and praised³⁷ God, saying, "So then, God has granted the repentance³⁸ that leads to life even to the Gentiles."³⁹

(Act 11:19) ***Activity in the Church at Antioch***

Now those who had been scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen⁴⁰ went as far as⁴¹ Phoenicia,⁴²

Cyprus,⁴³ and Antioch,⁴⁴ speaking the message⁴⁵ to no one but Jews.

(Act 11:20) But there were some men from Cyprus⁴⁶ and Cyrene⁴⁷ among them who came⁴⁸ to Antioch⁴⁹ and began to speak to the Greeks⁵⁰ too, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus.

(Act 11:21) The⁵¹ hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed⁵² turned⁵³ to the Lord.

(Act 11:22) A report⁵⁴ about them came to the attention⁵⁵ of the church in Jerusalem,⁵⁶ and they sent Barnabas⁵⁷ to Antioch.⁵⁸

(Act 11:23) When⁵⁹ he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain true⁶⁰ to the Lord with devoted hearts,⁶¹

(Act 11:24) because he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, and a significant number of people⁶²

were brought to the Lord.

(Act 11:25) Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to look for Saul,

(Act 11:26) and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch.⁶³ So⁶⁴ for a whole year Barnabas and Saul⁶⁵ met with the church and taught a significant number of people.⁶⁶ Now it was in Antioch⁶⁷ that the disciples were first called Christians.⁶⁸

(Act 11:27) ***Famine Relief for Judea***

At that time⁶⁹ some⁷⁰ prophets⁷¹ came down⁷² from Jerusalem⁷³ to Antioch.⁷⁴

(Act 11:28) One of them, named Agabus, got up⁷⁵ and predicted⁷⁶ by the Spirit that a severe⁷⁷ famine⁷⁸ was about to come over the whole inhabited world.⁷⁹ (This⁸⁰ took place during the reign of Claudius.)⁸¹

(Act 11:29) So the disciples, each in accordance with his financial ability,⁸² decided⁸³ to send relief⁸⁴ to the brothers living in Judea.

(Act 11:30) They did so,⁸⁵ sending their financial aid⁸⁶ to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

(Act 12:1) ***James is Killed and Peter Imprisoned***

About that time King Herod¹ laid hands on² some from the church to harm them.³

(Guzik)

Act 12:1-25

Acts 12 - JAMES IS MARTYRED, PETER IS SET FREE

A. James the apostle dies as a martyr.

1. (Act_12:1) Herod harasses the church.

Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church.

a. **Herod the king:** This is Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who ruled in the days of Jesus' birth (Mat_2:1-16). Herod Agrippa I was also the nephew of Herod Antipas, who had a role in the trial of Jesus (Luk_23:7-12).

b. **Stretched out his hand to harass some from the church:** No doubt, this was done because it was politically popular for Herod. It pleased many of his citizens who didn't like Christians. Many political figures are ready to persecute Christians if it will make them politically popular.

2. (Act_12:2) The death of the apostle James.

Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

a. **Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword:** This is a new development in the history of the church. James is the first of the twelve who followed Jesus to be martyred.

b. Up to Acts 12, the church has been on a "hot streak," experiencing one exciting conversion after another. First there was Saul of Tarsus, then the Gentile centurion Cornelius, then the mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles in Antioch. But in Acts 12, the ugly opposition inspired by Satan again raises its head.

c. James is certainly not the first *Christian* to die in faithfulness to Jesus. Stephen (Act_7:58-60) was martyred before this, and certainly others were also. But the death of James shattered the illusion that somehow, the twelve enjoyed a unique Divine protection.

d. **James the brother of John**, in particular, might have thought to have been "protected." He was one of the special intimates of Jesus, often mentioned with his brother John and with Peter (Mat_17:1; Mat_26:37, Mar_5:37; Mar_9:2; Mar_14:33; Luk_5:37; Luk_9:2; Luk_14:33).

i. But Jesus promised no special protection for even His closest followers; He warned them to be ready for persecution (Mat_10:16-26).

ii. In Mar_10:35-40, John and his brother James came to Jesus and asked to be considered His two chief

lieutenants. Jesus replied to them, *You do not know what you ask. Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?* James and John, not really knowing what they were saying, replied by saying they

could. Jesus promised them, *You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized*. This martyrdom was the fulfillment of that promise for James. John fulfilled it by a lifetime of devoted service to God despite repeated attempts to martyr him.

e. Normally, **with the sword** means that James was beheaded.

i. Eusebius relates a story from Clement of Alexandria, who says that the soldier who guarded James before the judge was so affected by his witness that he declared himself a Christian also and was willingly executed for Jesus along side of James (Eusebius, *Church History* 2.9.2-3).

f. Significantly, there was no attempt to “replace” James, as there was to replace Judas (Acts 1). This was because James died as a faithful martyr, but Judas revealed his apostasy in betraying Jesus. There was no need for another man to take the office of James.

B. The release of Peter from prison.

1. (Act_12:3-4) Herod imprisons Peter.

And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.

a. **Because he saw that it pleased the Jews**: Seeing his approval ratings rise in the polls when he kills James, Herod seeks to improve his ratings even more when **he proceeded further to Peter also**.

i. There was a significant difference between the persecution from Saul of Tarsus (Act_8:1-3) and from Herod.

Saul, wrong as he was, persecuted out of sincere (though misguided) religious conviction, Herod persecuted out of purely political motives.

b. **Intending to bring him before the people after Passover**: Herod will deal with Peter at a politically

opportune time, fearing an unpredictable mob reaction when Passover pilgrims flood Jerusalem.

i. Horton suggests three reasons for the delay in executing Peter: (1) Herod wanted to show how scrupulously he observed the Passover; (2) he wanted to wait until the pilgrim crowds went home, fearing a riot; (3) he wanted to wait until he had the full attention of the Jewish population.

c. **Delivered him to four squads of soldiers:** Knowing Peter (with the other apostles) had mysteriously escaped from prison before (Act_5:17-21), Herod assigns a high-security detail to guard Peter.

i. “Normally it was considered enough for a prisoner to be handcuffed to one soldier, but as a special precaution Peter had a soldier each side of him and both his wrists were manacled” (Stott)

2. (Act_12:5) The church prays for Peter.

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

a. **Prayer was offered to God for him by the church:** Herod has his soldiers and his prisons; but the church has the power of prayer. The outcome will be decided easily!

b. **Constant prayer was offered to God for him:** The word **constant** also has the idea of *earnest*; literally, the word pictures someone *stretching out all they can for something*. “The verb *ektenos* is related to *ektenes*, a medical term describing the stretching of a muscle to its limits.” (MacArthur) i. Luke uses this same word *ektenos* for the agonizing prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luk_22:44).

ii. Much of our prayer is powerless because it lacks earnestness. Too often we almost pray with the attitude of wanting God to care about things we really don’t care too much about.

iii. *Earnest* prayer has power not because it in itself persuades a reluctant God. Instead, it demonstrates that our heart cares passionately about the things God cares about,

fulfilling Jesus' promise *If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you* (Joh_15:7).

c. **Constant prayer was offered to God:** It is also important to see that the church prayed **to God**. It may seem obvious, but often our prayers are weak because we are not consciously coming into the presence of our great and holy God, offering our requests to Him.

d. When every other gate is shut and locked, the gate to heaven is wide open. We must take advantage of that open gate through prayer!

3. (Act_12:6-11) God sends an angel to free Peter from prison.

And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" And his chains fell off *his* hands. Then the angel said to him, "Gird yourself and tie on your sandals"; and so he did. And he said to him, "Put on your garment and follow me." So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people."

a. The chains, the guards, the prison doors mean nothing to God and His appointed messengers; Peter is instantly set free.

b. **That night Peter was sleeping:** Peter shows no signs of anxiety. He is able to sleep soundly on what seemed to be the last night before his execution. Remember, *He gives His beloved sleep* (Psa_127:2).

c. **Did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision:** Peter obeyed without really knowing what was happening. He knew enough to sense that God was doing something and the explanation could come later.

d. **They came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord:** The soldiers, the chains, the guard posts, the iron gate - are all nothing when God is with us and prayer is behind us. Many of us are worrying about the **iron gate** before we ever get to it. A month before hand, and we are anxious about the **iron gate!**

But God will take care of it when we come to it.

e. F.F. Bruce relates the story of Sundar Singh, a Tibetan Christian who was likewise freed miraculously from a prison. For his preaching of the gospel, he was thrown into a well, and a cover was put over it and securely locked. He would be left in the well until he died, and he could see the bones and rotting corpses of those who had already perished in their. On the third night of his imprisonment, he heard someone unlocking the cover of the well and removing it. A voice told him to take hold of the rope that was being lowered. Sundar was grateful that the rope had a loop he could put his foot in, because he had injured his arm in the fall down into the well. He was raised up, and the cover was replaced and locked, but when he looked to thank his rescuer he could find no one. When morning came, he went back to the same place he was arrested and started preaching again. News of the preaching came to the official who had him arrested, and Sundar was brought before him again. When the official said someone must have gotten the key and released him, they searched for the key - and found

it on the official's own belt. God is still writing the Book of Acts!

f. **And has delivered me from the hand of Herod:** Why did James die and Peter find deliverance? God alone knows; we know though, that James, having graduated to glory, did not consider himself a loser in any way!

i. Simply, it wasn't time for Peter to go home yet. Until it was time, he was invulnerable. He couldn't be harmed. It was time for James; it was not time for Peter.

4. (Act_12:12-17) Peter presents himself to the believers that prayed for him.

So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of *her* gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate. But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!" Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, "It is his angel." Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place.

a. This brief account is so natural, so true to life. Passages like this display the completely historical character of the Book of Acts.

b. **Because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate:** Rhoda is so excited to hear from Peter that she leaves him out at the gate!

c. **But they said to her, "You are beside yourself!"** We are comforted (and amused) by the little faith of these

Christians. Even while they are praying for Peter, they find it hard to believe God actually answered their prayer.

i. Their prayer was earnest, but their faith was not overwhelming. Little faith can accomplish great things if it is placed in the great God.

d. **It is his angel:** The Jews believed in the idea of “guardian angels,” and it seems that they may have believed that one’s guardian angel bore some kind of resemblance to the human it was assigned to.

e. **Go, tell these things to James and the brethren:** The **James** that Peter tells others to report to is not the James who was just martyred. It is probably James, the brother of Jesus, who was a prominent figure in the church at Jerusalem.

f. **And he departed and went to another place:** Except for a brief mention in chapter 15, this is the last Luke speaks of Peter. We know that Peter later met Paul in Antioch (Gal_2:11-14), and later he wrote his two letters.

5. (Act_12:18-19) The execution of the soldiers who guarded Peter.

Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter. But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*.

a. **No small stir** is one of the great understatements of the Bible; Herod was furious that his prized prisoner had escaped.

b. **He examined the guards and commanded that they should be put to death:** The execution of the guards was customary; in that day, if a guard’s prisoner escaped, the guard was given the penalty due to the prisoner - in this case, death.

C. God judges a blaspheming Herod and blesses an obedient church.

1. (Act_12:20-21) Herod gives a speech to the people of Tyre and Sidon, who are anxious to please Herod.

Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's *country*. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them.

2. (Act_12:22-23) Herod receives the overstated praise of the people of Tyre and Sidon, and he receives the judgment of the God he refused to glorify.

And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.

a. **He was eaten by worms and died:** The manner of Herod's death befits his spiritual state; he corrupted from the inside out.

b. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus also describes the death of Herod in gory detail (*Antiquities*, XIX.8.2).

i. "He put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture truly wonderful, and came into the theatre early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another (though not for his good), that he was a god . . . A severe pain also arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner . . .

when he had been quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life."

3. (Act_12:24-25) The work of God continues without hindrance.

But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their*

ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.

a. **But the word of God grew and multiplied:** The contrast between Herod and the church is clear. Herod believed he had the upper hand against God's people, but God showed who was really in charge - Herod is judged, the church is blessed.

i. Herod fought against God; but the church submitted to God and got in line with His plan through prayer.

ii. History is filled with the stories of men who thought they could fight God and succeed; their ruined lives are evidence that it can't be done. Friedrich Nietzsche was the philosopher who coined the idea that God was dead, and that Christianity was a despised religion of weaklings. Fighting God drove him insane, and he spent the last several years of his life in that condition. Sinclair Lewis won the Nobel prize for literature, and fought against God in his book *Elmer Gantry*. The book was about an evangelist who was also an alcoholic and would sleep with any woman he could. Sinclair Lewis died a hopeless alcoholic in a clinic near Rome. Writer Ernest Hemingway lived his life of adventure and sin against God seemingly without consequences - until he blew his head off with a shotgun.

Fighting against God just doesn't work.

b. **Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem:**

Coming back from their relief effort to Jerusalem (Act_11:30), Barnabas and Saul brought John Mark with them back to the church at Antioch.

(Act 12:2) He had James, the brother of John, executed with a sword.⁴

(Act 12:3) When he saw that this pleased the Jews,⁵ he proceeded to arrest Peter too. (This took place during the feast of Unleavened Bread.)⁶

(Act 12:4) When he had seized him, he put him in prison, handing him over to four squads⁷ of soldiers to guard him. Herod⁸ planned⁹

to bring him out for public trial¹⁰ after the Passover.

(Act 12:5) So Peter was kept in prison, but those in the church were earnestly¹¹ praying to God for him.¹²

(Act 12:6) On that very night before Herod was going to bring him out for trial,¹³ Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while¹⁴ guards in front of the door were keeping watch¹⁵ over the prison.

(Act 12:7) Suddenly¹⁶ an angel of the Lord¹⁷ appeared, and a light shone in the prison cell. He struck¹⁸ Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, "Get up quickly!" And the chains fell off Peter's¹⁹ wrists.²⁰

(Act 12:8) The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt²¹ and put on your sandals." Peter²² did so. Then the angel²³ said to him, "Put on your cloak²⁴ and follow me."

(Act 12:9) Peter²⁵ went out²⁶ and followed him;²⁷ he did not realize that what was happening through the angel was real,²⁸ but thought he was seeing a vision.

(Act 12:10) After they had passed the first and second guards,²⁹ they came to the iron³⁰ gate leading into the city. It³¹ opened for them by itself,³² and they went outside and walked down one narrow street,³³ when at once the angel left him.

(Act 12:11) When³⁴ Peter came to himself, he said, "Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued³⁵ me from the hand³⁶ of Herod³⁷ and from everything the Jewish people³⁸ were expecting to happen."

(Act 12:12) When Peter³⁹ realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark,⁴⁰ where many people had gathered together and were praying.

(Act 12:13) When he knocked at the door of the outer gate, a slave girl named Rhoda answered.⁴¹

(Act 12:14) When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she did not open the gate, but ran back in and told⁴² them⁴³ that Peter was standing at the gate.

(Act 12:15) But they said to her, "You've lost your mind!"⁴⁴ But she kept insisting that it was Peter,⁴⁵ and they kept

saying,⁴⁶ "It is his angel!"⁴⁷

(Act 12:16) Now Peter continued knocking, and when they opened the door⁴⁸ and saw him, they were greatly astonished.⁴⁹

(Act 12:17) He motioned to them⁵⁰ with his hand to be quiet and then related⁵¹ how the Lord had brought⁵² him out of the prison. He said, "Tell James and the brothers these things," and then he left and went to another place.⁵³

(Act 12:18) At daybreak⁵⁴ there was great consternation⁵⁵ among the soldiers over what had become of Peter.

(Act 12:19) When Herod⁵⁶ had searched⁵⁷ for him and did not find him, he questioned⁵⁸ the guards and commanded that they be led away to execution.⁵⁹ Then⁶⁰ Herod⁶¹ went down from Judea to Caesarea⁶² and stayed there.

(Act 12:20) Now Herod⁶³ was having an angry quarrel⁶⁴ with the people of Tyre⁶⁵ and Sidon.⁶⁶ So they joined together⁶⁷ and presented themselves before him. And after convincing⁶⁸ Blastus, the king's personal assistant,⁶⁹ to help them,⁷⁰ they asked for peace,⁷¹ because their country's food supply was provided by the king's country.

(Act 12:21) On a day determined in advance, Herod⁷² put on his royal robes,⁷³ sat down on the judgment seat,⁷⁴ and made a speech⁷⁵ to them.

(Act 12:22) But the crowd⁷⁶ began to shout,⁷⁷ "The voice of a god,⁷⁸ and not of a man!"

(Act 12:23) Immediately an angel of the Lord⁷⁹ struck⁸⁰ Herod⁸¹ down because he did not give the glory to God, and he was eaten by worms and died.⁸²

(Act 12:24) But the word of God⁸³ kept on increasing⁸⁴ and multiplying.

(Act 12:25) So Barnabas and Saul returned to⁸⁵ Jerusalem⁸⁶ when they had completed⁸⁷ their mission,⁸⁸ bringing along with them John Mark.⁸⁹

(Act 13:1) ***The Church at Antioch Commissions Barnabas and Saul***

Now there were these prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch:¹ Barnabas, Simeon called Niger,² Lucius the Cyrenian,³

Manaen (a close friend of Herod⁴ the tetrarch⁵ from childhood⁶) and Saul.

(Guzik)

Act 13:1-52

Acts 13 - PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY BEGINS

A. Barnabas and Saul are called and sent by the Holy Spirit.

1. (Act_13:1) The people at the church in Antioch.

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

a. In Act_12:25, we learn Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark were all at the church in Antioch, having returned from delivering a gift of support to the church in Jerusalem (Act_11:27-30). Saul and Barnabas were among the teachers and prophets there, as were **Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen**.

b. **Simeon who was called Niger**: Since **Niger** means *black*, he was presumably a black African among the congregation at Antioch, and possibly he was the same **Simeon** who carried Jesus' cross (Luk_23:26).

c. The **Manaen** mentioned here **had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch**. This was the same Herod who beheaded John the Baptist and presided over one of Jesus' trials (Luk_23:7-12).

2. (Act_13:2) The Holy Spirit calls Barnabas and Saul.

As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

a. **As they ministered to the Lord**: The call came when they **ministered to the Lord**. This is the first job of any servant of God, to minister unto the Lord.

i. They were doing the service of priests under the new covenant, offering their bodies as living sacrifices (Rom_12:1). “The word translated *worshipping* [*ministered*, NKJV] is that usually employed in the LXX for the service of priests and Levites in the temple.” (Williams)

b. As part of their service to the Lord, they also **fasted**. Why did they fast? It is likely they sensed an urgency about something, a need to seek God in a special way. What did they seek God about? Judging from the response, it was about the need to spread the gospel to all the earth.

c. **The Holy Spirit said:** Presumably, the call came through the ministry of prophets in the church at Antioch, though it could have come simply through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

i. “I do not for a moment imagine that the assembly heard a voice. That is the mistake we too often make. We try to force ourselves into ecstasies in order to hear the voice, then we imagine we hear it!” (Morgan)

d. **Separate to Me:** Before Barnabas and Saul can do anything great for God, they must first be separated to Him. If you will separate to God, it means you must separate from some other things.

i. You can’t really say “yes” to God’s call on your life until you can say “no” to things that will keep you from that call.

e. **For the work to which I have called them:** God had a specific work He had appointed to Barnabas and Saul to do. Paul would later write in Eph_2:10 : *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* God is calling Barnabas and Saul to these good works!

i. The calling God had for the life of Paul had already been stated in Act_9:15-16 : *He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.* This was not a touchy-feely “feel good” call - it was a serious call to a serious ministry.

f. **Now separate to Me:** God gave a timetable - **now**. Before, God had told Paul through Ananias what his calling was, but not that it was **now**. **Now** meant there was to be no delay.

g. If we assume they were fasting and praying about the need of the world for Jesus, we can see how God was answering their prayer - by using them! This is often how God moves, by sending the people who have it on their hearts to pray.

i. Many want to be “back seat drivers” in the ministry. They hope to say, “I’ll have the burden and you do the work.” But God’s typical way of working is to send the people who have the burden to do the work.

3. (Act_13:3) The Holy Spirit sends Barnabas and Saul.

Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.

a. **Having fasted and prayed:** They were sent with fasting and prayer; now they had something to really pray and depend on God about!

b. **And laid hands on them:** The laying on of hands was a formal commissioning to this ministry; certainly Barnabas and Saul were “ordained” before this, but now they were entering a different sphere of ministry.

c. **They sent them away:** Notice that the church in Antioch *sent* Barnabas and Saul out. They were supported and sent by a specific congregation. As far as we know, this had never happened before in the history of the church. Certainly, people went out as “accidental missionaries” (as in Act_8:4 and Act_11:19) but there was never a concerted and organized effort to win people to Jesus like this.

d. Where is the committee report? Where are the demographics? Where is the marketing survey? Where is the “spiritual mapping”? Barnabas and Saul went out without any of these things, only with the call and power of the Holy Spirit.

B. Ministry in the cities of Seleucia, Salamis and Paphos.

1. (Act_13:4) First stop: Seleucia.

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

a. **So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit:** Yes, the Christians of the church at Antioch sent Saul and Barnabas. But more importantly, it was the Holy Spirit sending them. And group of Christians can send someone, but if the **Spirit** doesn't send them, it won't amount to eternally effective ministry.

b. **Went down to Seleucia:** We aren't told of any specific ministry taking place in **Seleucia**, a city near Antioch. Saul and Barnabas may have gone there merely because it was the port city near Antioch, but it is hard to imagine them not doing *any* ministry there.

c. Since **Seleucia** wasn't far from Antioch, where there was a thriving church, it isn't difficult to assume there was already a group of Christians there in that city.

2. (Act_13:5) On the island of Cyprus: The city of **Salamis**, on the east coast.

And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant.

a. We are not told *why* they went to Cyprus first, but we do know Barnabas grew up on that island (Act_4:36).

b. **They preached the word of God in the synagogues:** This custom of the "open synagogue" would Barnabas and Saul many opportunities to preach. The custom of the open synagogue invited any learned man to speak to the congregation on the Sabbath.

c. **They also had John as their assistant:** This man, also known as *John Mark*, was mentioned previously in Act_12:25. He is traveling with Barnabas and Saul on this trip.

i. This is the same Mark who will later write the Gospel that bears his name.

ii. Mark would have been a valuable companion for Barnabas and Saul. He grew up in Jerusalem, and was an eyewitness of many of the events in the life of Jesus and could relate them with special power to Barnabas and Saul, and to others whom they were preaching to.

3. (Act_13:6-12) Ministry in Paphos, a city on the west coast of Cyprus.

Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name *was* Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?

"And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

a. **Paphos**: This city was known for its immorality: "Paphos was infamous for its worship of Venus, the goddess of [sexual]

love" (Barclay). We will see in Paphos a familiar combination: Immorality connected with spiritual darkness.

b. While ministering in the city (presumably after the same fashion - going into the synagogues and presenting Jesus), the representative of the Roman government (**the proconsul**) **sought to hear the word of God**.

i. "All Roman provinces were divided into two classes, those that required troops and those that did not. The latter were

administered by the Senate and ruled by proconsuls; the former were under the administration of the emperor.” (Williams)

c. **Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated)**: Paul is opposed by a man named **Elymas**. His real name was **Bar-Jesus**, which means “son of Jesus,” and Luke couldn’t bear to call him that! This **Elymas** attempts to frustrate the missionary efforts of Saul and Barnabas with the local Roman leader.

i. We should not be surprised or shaken by opposition. “Wherever there is likely to be great success, the open door and the opposing adversaries will both be found. If there are no adversaries, you may fear that there will be no success. A boy cannot get his kite up without wind, nor without a wind which drives *against* his kite.” (Spurgeon) d. **Saul, who also is called Paul**: It was common for people in that day to have names that were similar, yet different according to the language or culture they were in. Certainly, Saul’s given name was **Saul**, a Jewish name after the first king of Israel. But his Roman name was **Paul**, sounding similar to “Saul.”

i. “Saul’s father gave the child a Roman and a Latin name because he was a Roman citizen with all the rights in the Roman Empire this implied. The child had both names from infancy. When his father called him he shouted, ‘Saul, Saul!’ but when the Greek boys with whom he played called him they shouted, ‘Paul, Paul!’” (Lenski) e. **Filled with the Holy Spirit . . . “O full of all deceit and all fraud”** : Paul, using spiritual discernment and operating in the gift of faith, rebukes and pronounces the judgment of God upon Elymas (**you shall be blind**).

i. As Elymas is struck with blindness, we can’t help but think Paul would remember his own experience with God.

Paul was struck blind at his conversion on the road to Damascus (Act_9:9). Certainly, those who are resisting God are blind spiritually, so God is just giving Elymas a physical blindness corresponding to his spiritual blindness.

However, we never hear of Elymas repenting, as Paul did.

f. **Then the proconsul believed:** Is Paul being too harsh here? Who does he think he is, coming against Elymas this way? Paul is acting correctly, because the eternal destiny of Sergius Paulus is at stake.

i. If you want to commit spiritual suicide, that's one thing. But how dare you bring others down with you? If you want to give up on the things of God and grow bitter in your heart against Him, that's your choice. But it is a heavy sin to draw anyone else away with you, either with your words or your example.

ii. "The severest words of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, are reserved for those who stand between men and truth, for those who stand between men and God . . . It must be the heart that loves Sergius Paulus that speaks in anger to Elymas the sorcerer." (Morgan)

g. **When he saw what had been done:** What was it that the proconsul saw?

i. He saw the courage of Paul. Here was a man of conviction, bold in his belief, and willing to make a stand for what he believed.

ii. He saw the just result of Elymas' sin, physical blindness corresponding to his spiritual blindness. If only we would see more of the trouble sin gets people into, we might run after the things of God a little harder!

h. **Being astonished at the teaching of the Lord:** As amazing as the miracle of Elymas' sudden blindness was, the good news the proconsul heard from Paul was even more amazing. His astonishment is said to be at the **teaching of the Lord** (presumably, the doctrines of God's gracious gift to man in Jesus, through the cross) not the miraculous work before his eyes.

4. (Act_13:13) From Paphos to Perga.

Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

a. **They came to Perga:** Paul, Barnabas and their companions leave the island of Cyprus, coming to Perga on the mainland of what is today Turkey.

b. **John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem:**

We don't know exactly why John Mark went home to Jerusalem. Was he homesick for his family? Was he afraid of the tough and dangerous travel through the mountains ahead of them? Was he resentful that the team of his cousin *Barnabas and Saul* (Act_12:25) had now become **Paul and his party**? Was he a pessimist because Paul was suffering from poor health (Gal_4:13)? Whatever the reason, Paul didn't appreciate the fact that John Mark abandoned the missionary journey here.

i. Who was right? Who was wrong? God had to deal with each party involved, but a great work was still going to be done for the glory of the Lord. Paul would continue to reach the world for Jesus, and John would write one of the gospels.

C. The sermon at Pisidian Antioch.

1. (Act_13:14-15) The customary invitation in the synagogue gives Paul an opportunity to preach the gospel.

But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."

a. **Went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets.** A synagogue service generally went like this: Opening prayers were offered, then there was a reading from **the Law** (the first five books of the Old Testament). Then, a reading from **the Prophets**. Then, if there was an educated person present, they were invited to speak on subjects related to the readings.

b. **Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on:** Paul wasn't the kind

of man who you invited to give a **word of exhortation** without expecting that he would take you up on the offer.

2. (Act_13:16-23) Paul begins his sermon in the synagogue, explaining how God's work in history culminates in Jesus.

Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment. After that He gave *them* judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after My *own* heart, who will do all My will.' From this man's seed, according to *the* promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior; Jesus."

a. **Men of Israel and you who fear God** addresses both groups who would be at the synagogue on a typical Sabbath: Jews and "near Jews," those Gentiles who admired Jewish religion but did not make a full commitment to Judaism.

b. In this survey of Israel's history, Paul notes important events - the choosing of the patriarchs, the deliverance from Egypt, the time in the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, the time of the Judges, the creation of a monarchy - but it all culminates in Jesus (**according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior; Jesus**).

c. This survey of Israel's history demonstrates that God has a plan for history, and we need to sense a connection to that plan. Jesus is the goal of history, and as we are in Jesus, we are in the flow of God's great plan of redemption.

3. (Act_13:24-29) Using the examples of John the Baptist and the Jewish rulers, Paul shows how people both received and rejected Jesus.

“After John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not *He*. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.’ Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*. And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb.”

a. **As John was finishing his course, he said:** John the Baptist responded to Jesus the right way. He prepared the hearts of others of Jesus, and he saw Jesus as who He is. John knew Jesus was the One greater than all others. He knew Jesus was more than a teacher, He was the Lord God we must all answer to.

i. **The sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose:** This statement shows that John knew Jesus was high above him. In that day, it was not uncommon for a great teacher to have disciples follow him, and it was expected that the disciples would serve the teacher in various ways. This arrangement came to be abused, so the leading rabbis established certain things that were too demeaning for a teacher to expect of his disciple. It was decided that for a teacher to expect his disciple to undo the strap of his sandal was too much; it was too demeaning. Here, John insists he isn't even worthy to do this for Jesus!

b. **For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him:** Those who didn't know the Scriptures rejected Jesus, and delivered Him to Pilate to be executed, and Jesus was executed, and laid in a tomb.

i. **They took Him down from the tree:** In calling the cross a **tree**, Paul is drawing on the idea from Deu_21:22-23. In that passage, it says that God curses a person who is hanged from a tree. Paul wants to communicate the idea that Jesus was cursed so we could be blessed (Gal_3:13).

4. (Act_13:30-37) Paul preaches the resurrected Jesus.

"But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings; that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.' And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: 'I will give you the sure mercies of David.' Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*: 'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.' For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption."

a. **But God!** What glorious words! Man had done his best to fight against God - even to kill Him - **but God** was greater than man's sin and rebellion, and rose in triumph over sin and death.

b. The fact is simply stated (**But God raised Him from the dead**). But evidence from eyewitnesses is offered (**He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him**).

c. Then, Paul applies the truth of resurrection. The resurrection means that Jesus truly is the unique Son of God (Psa_2:7), and it proves He was utterly holy even in His work on the cross (Psa_16:10).

5. (Act_13:38-41) With a promise and a warning, Paul applies the truth of who Jesus is and what He has done.

“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: ‘Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, a work which you will by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you.’”

a. **Through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins:** The promise is that, because of who Jesus is and what He has done for us, **forgiveness** is offered to us freely in Jesus. We may be **justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses**.

i. What’s wrong with justifying ourselves before God? It assumes God grades on a curve; it gives us the glory for our own salvation - instead of simply saying *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (Eph_2:8-9)

ii. Some refuse to embrace the salvation of Jesus in the secret place of their heart, because they want a salvation of their *own* making. They want to be saved the old-fashioned way - they want to *earn* it.

iii. In only a few months, Paul will be writing a letter to these churches in Galatia, dealing with these same themes of being justified by God’s grace and not by keeping the law.

b. **Everyone who believes is justified:** Jesus does not only forgive us, but we are also **justified** by Him. Forgiveness takes care of the debt of sin, but justification puts a “credit” on our account before God.

c. **Beware, therefore:** The warning is that if we do not embrace the person and work of Jesus with our whole lives, we are **despisers** who will **perish**.

d. Some commentators have complained that Paul preaches too much like Peter did on Pentecost. But what is to complain about? It shows us that Peter and Paul preached the same gospel, and the same gospel was preached some fifteen years after Pentecost as was preached on that first day.

i. Others note similarities between Paul's sermon here and the sermon of Stephen in Acts 7. That was a sermon that Paul heard when he still hated the name of Jesus. Perhaps the sermon of the first martyr of the church was still ringing in the ears of the man who led his execution!

D. The Response to the sermon at Pisidian Antioch.

1. (Act_13:42-43) Many people, both Jews and Gentiles, express interest in Paul's message.

So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.

Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

a. We should assume that many of these believed, because Paul and Barnabas **persuaded them to continue in the grace of God**. This means they had already started to trust in the grace of God.

b. *Continuing* in grace is as important as beginning in grace; we must never leave it as the basic principle of our relationship with God. Far too many only think of **grace** as the introduction to the Christian life, but God wants **grace** to remain as the foundation for our life with Him.

2. (Act_13:44-45) On the next Sabbath, envy creates opposition.

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.

a. **On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God:**

The scene is easy to picture. The whole city is ready to hear the gospel from Paul on the next Sabbath, and this dramatic response makes the leaders of the synagogue envious, because they aren't in charge any more!

i. This is inevitable for those who are more concerned about being popular than serving God. When someone else is more popular, they get envious! We can't all be popular to the same degree, but we can all serve and please God to the same degree in Jesus Christ.

b. **Contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul:** Suddenly, Paul's preaching is opposed as if he were conducting a debate, his opponents **contradicting** him, and **blaspheming** God.

i. The blasphemy mentioned probably has to do with abusive and degrading language directed towards Jesus, whom Paul preached.

c. Why? Why would these religious people reject the Messiah they had waited for so long? One great reason was they wanted to keep the division between Jew and Gentile, and if Jesus was to be the Messiah of all men, they wanted no part of Him.

i. "They simply could not accept a teaching that opened such floodgates. For themselves and their adherents they could accept a message as God-sent and tolerate some change in their teaching and practice, but they could not endure that the Gentiles should be made equal with God's ancient people." (Williams)

ii. "The Jews could not endure that the Gentiles should be equal to them, being as much concerned against the Gentiles being exalted, as against their own being depressed." (Poole)

iii. Some people end up rejecting Jesus because of the way He changes our relationship with other people. Some would

rather hold on to their bitterness and animosity towards others than turn to Jesus and be reconciled.

3. (Act_13:46-50) Paul and Barnabas respond to the Jewish opposition.

Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

a. **Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold:** Praise God for their zeal for the things of God! They wouldn't let this challenge go unanswered, because they really believed the truth about Jesus.

b. **Since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles:** They rebuke those who reject Jesus, letting the Jews know that it was a privilege that this message should come to them first, a privilege they are rejecting.

c. **Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed:** They respond with more evangelism to open hearts, now directing their efforts to the Gentiles, in obedience to God's command (Rom_1:16) and in fulfillment of prophecy (the quotation from Isa_49:6).

i. The Gentiles respond to Paul's invitation with enthusiastic belief, learning with joy that God *does not* hate Gentiles, but offers them salvation in Jesus.

ii. Paul shows wisdom in not spending all his time trying to persuade hardened hearts. We know that even after he made Gentiles the focus of his evangelistic efforts, he still prayed earnestly for the salvation of Israel (Rom_10:1), but he spent his missionary time ministering to more open hearts.

d. **And the word of the Lord was being spread:** It was being spread through the efforts of Paul and Barnabas, but especially through the lives of these people being brought to Jesus Christ.

e. **But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region:** Wherever there is revival, the second party to be revived is the Devil. Jewish opposition was strong enough to force Paul and Barnabas to leave the area.

4. (Act_13:51-52) Paul and Barnabas react to their expulsion from the city of Pisidian Antioch.

But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

a. **But they shook off the dust from their feet against them:** In doing this, Paul and Barnabas are treating the city as if they were a God-rejecting Gentile city.

i. If Jewish people had to go in or through a Gentile city, when leaving the city they would shake the dust off their feet as a gesture saying, “We don’t want to take anything from this Gentile city with us.” In this sense, Paul is saying “I don’t want to take anything with me from you Jesus-rejecting religionists.”

ii. This rejection did not make Paul and Barnabas think there was anything wrong with *themselves*. They knew the problem is with their opposition, not themselves.

b. **And came to Iconium:** They carry on the work, going next to **Iconium**. All too often, rejection and opposition for

the sake of the gospel makes us want to give up. But Paul and Barnabas respond with appropriate determination.

c. They were **filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit**. Being filled with joy and being filled with the Holy Spirit go together, and they have a joy that contradicts their circumstances.

i. Paul is a great example of his own command to *be constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit* (Eph_5:18).

ii. "The happiness of a genuine Christian lies far beyond the reach of earthly disturbances, and is not affected by the changes and chances to which mortal things are exposed. The martyrs were more happy in the *flames* than their persecutors could be on their beds of down." (Clarke)

(Act 13:2) While they were serving⁷ the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart⁸ for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

(Act 13:3) Then, after they had fasted⁹ and¹⁰ prayed and placed their hands¹¹ on them, they sent them off.

(Act 13:4) ***Paul and Barnabas Preach in Cyprus***

So Barnabas and Saul,¹² sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia,¹³ and from there they sailed to Cyprus.¹⁴

(Act 13:5) When¹⁵ they arrived¹⁶ in Salamis,¹⁷ they began to proclaim¹⁸ the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.¹⁹ (Now they also had John²⁰ as their assistant.)²¹

(Act 13:6) When they had crossed over²² the whole island as far as Paphos,²³ they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus,²⁴

(Act 13:7) who was with the proconsul²⁵ Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. The proconsul²⁶ summoned²⁷ Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear²⁸ the word of God.

(Act 13:8) But the magician Elymas²⁹ (for that is the way his name is translated)³⁰ opposed them, trying to turn the proconsul³¹ away from the faith.

(Act 13:9) But Saul (also known as Paul),³² filled with the Holy Spirit,³³ stared straight³⁴ at him

(Act 13:10) and said, "You who are full of all deceit and all wrongdoing,³⁵ you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness — will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?³⁶

(Act 13:11) Now³⁷ look, the hand of the Lord is against³⁸ you, and you will be blind, unable to see the sun for a time!" Immediately mistiness³⁹ and darkness came over⁴⁰ him, and he went around seeking people⁴¹ to lead him by the hand.

(Act 13:12) Then when the proconsul⁴² saw what had happened, he believed,⁴³ because he was greatly astounded⁴⁴ at the teaching about⁴⁵ the Lord.

(Act 13:13) ***Paul and Barnabas at Pisidian Antioch***

Then Paul and his companions put out to sea⁴⁶ from Paphos⁴⁷ and came to Perga⁴⁸ in Pamphylia,⁴⁹ but John⁵⁰ left them and returned to Jerusalem.⁵¹

(Act 13:14) Moving on from⁵² Perga,⁵³ they arrived at Pisidian Antioch,⁵⁴ and on the Sabbath day they went into⁵⁵ the synagogue⁵⁶ and sat down.

(Act 13:15) After the reading from the law and the prophets,⁵⁷ the leaders of the synagogue⁵⁸ sent them a message,⁵⁹ saying, "Brothers,⁶⁰ if you have any message⁶¹ of exhortation⁶² for the people, speak it."⁶³

(Act 13:16) So Paul stood up,⁶⁴ gestured⁶⁵ with his hand and said,

"Men of Israel,⁶⁶ and you Gentiles who fear God,⁶⁷ listen:

(Act 13:17) The God of this people Israel⁶⁸ chose our ancestors⁶⁹ and made the people great⁷⁰ during their stay as foreigners⁷¹ in the country⁷² of Egypt, and with uplifted arm⁷³ he led them out of it.

(Act 13:18) For⁷⁴ a period of about forty years he put up with⁷⁵ them in the wilderness.⁷⁶

(Act 13:19) After⁷⁷ he had destroyed⁷⁸ seven nations⁷⁹ in the land of Canaan, he gave his people their land as an inheritance.⁸⁰

(Act 13:20) All this took⁸¹ about four hundred fifty years. After this⁸² he gave them judges until the time of⁸³ Samuel the prophet.

(Act 13:21) Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man from the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled⁸⁴ forty years.

(Act 13:22) After removing him, God⁸⁵ raised up⁸⁶ David their king. He testified about him:⁸⁷ ***' I have found David***
88 the son of Jesse to be a man after my heart,⁸⁹ who will accomplish everything I want him to do.'⁹⁰

(Act 13:23) From the descendants⁹¹ of this man⁹² God brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, just as he promised.⁹³

(Act 13:24) Before⁹⁴ Jesus⁹⁵ arrived, John⁹⁶ had proclaimed a baptism for repentance⁹⁷ to all the people of Israel.

(Act 13:25) But while John was completing his mission,⁹⁸ he said repeatedly,⁹⁹ 'What do you think I am? I am not he. But look, one is coming after me. I am not worthy to untie the sandals on his feet!'¹⁰⁰

(Act 13:26) Brothers,¹⁰¹ descendants¹⁰² of Abraham's family,¹⁰³ and those Gentiles among you who fear God,¹⁰⁴ the message¹⁰⁵ of this salvation has been sent to us.

(Act 13:27) For the people who live in Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize¹⁰⁶ him,¹⁰⁷ and they fulfilled the sayings¹⁰⁸ of the prophets that are read every Sabbath by condemning¹⁰⁹ him.¹¹⁰

(Act 13:28) Though¹¹¹ they found¹¹² no basis¹¹³ for a death sentence,¹¹⁴ they asked Pilate to have him executed.

(Act 13:29) When they had accomplished¹¹⁵ everything that was written¹¹⁶ about him, they took him down¹¹⁷ from the cross¹¹⁸ and placed him¹¹⁹ in a tomb.

(Act 13:30) But God raised¹²⁰ him from the dead,
(Act 13:31) and¹²¹ for many days he appeared to those who
had accompanied¹²² him from Galilee to Jerusalem.
These¹²³ are now his witnesses to the people.

(Act 13:32) And we proclaim to you the good news about the
promise to our ancestors,¹²⁴

(Act 13:33) that this promise¹²⁵ God has fulfilled to us,
their children, by raising¹²⁶ Jesus, as also it is written in the
second psalm, ' **You**

are my Son; ¹²⁷ today I have fathered you.'¹²⁸

(Act 13:34) But regarding the fact that he has raised
Jesus¹²⁹ from the dead, never¹³⁰ again to be¹³¹ in a state
of decay, God¹³² has spoken in this way: ' **I will give you**
¹³³ the holy and trustworthy promises ¹³⁴ made to

David.'¹³⁵
(Act 13:35) Therefore he also says in another psalm,¹³⁶ ' **You will not permit your Holy One ¹³⁷ to experience**
¹³⁸ decay.'¹³⁹

(Act 13:36) For David, after he had served¹⁴⁰ God's purpose
in his own generation, died,¹⁴¹ was buried with his
ancestors,¹⁴² and experienced¹⁴³ decay, (Act 13:37) but
the one¹⁴⁴ whom God raised up did not experience¹⁴⁵
decay.

(Act 13:38) Therefore let it be known to you, brothers, that
through this one¹⁴⁶ forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,
(Act 13:39) and by this one¹⁴⁷ everyone who believes is
justified¹⁴⁸ from everything from which the law of Moses
could not justify¹⁴⁹
you.¹⁵⁰

(Act 13:40) Watch out,¹⁵¹ then, that what is spoken about
by¹⁵² the prophets does not happen to you:

(Act 13:41) ' **Look, you scoffers; be amazed and perish!**
¹⁵³

For I am doing a work in your days,:
a work you would never believe, even if someone
tells you. ' "¹⁵⁴

(Act 13:42) As Paul and Barnabas¹⁵⁵ were going out,¹⁵⁶ the people¹⁵⁷ were urging¹⁵⁸ them to speak about these things¹⁵⁹ on the next Sabbath.

(Act 13:43) When the meeting of the synagogue¹⁶⁰ had broken up,¹⁶¹ many of the Jews and God-fearing proselytes¹⁶² followed Paul and Barnabas, who were speaking with them and were persuading¹⁶³ them¹⁶⁴ to continue¹⁶⁵ in the grace of God.

(Act 13:44) On the next Sabbath almost the whole city assembled together to hear the word of the Lord.¹⁶⁶

(Act 13:45) But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy,¹⁶⁷ and they began to contradict¹⁶⁸ what Paul was saying¹⁶⁹ by reviling him.¹⁷⁰

(Act 13:46) Both Paul and Barnabas replied courageously,¹⁷¹ "It was necessary to speak the word of God¹⁷² to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy¹⁷³ of eternal life, we¹⁷⁴ are turning to the Gentiles.¹⁷⁵

(Act 13:47) For this¹⁷⁶ is what the Lord has commanded us: ' *I have appointed* ¹⁷⁷ *you to be a light* ¹⁷⁸ *for the Gentiles, to bring salvation* ¹⁷⁹ *to the ends of the earth.* ' "¹⁸⁰

(Act 13:48) When the Gentiles heard this, they began to rejoice¹⁸¹ and praise¹⁸² the word of the Lord, and all who had been appointed for eternal life¹⁸³ believed.

(Act 13:49) So the word of the Lord was spreading¹⁸⁴ through the entire region.

(Act 13:50) But the Jews incited¹⁸⁵ the God-fearing women of high social standing and the prominent men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and threw them out¹⁸⁶ of their region.

(Act 13:51) So after they shook¹⁸⁷ the dust off their feet¹⁸⁸ in protest against them, they went to Iconium.¹⁸⁹

(Act 13:52) And the disciples were filled with joy¹⁹⁰ and with the Holy Spirit.

(Act 14:1) ***Paul and Barnabas at Iconium***

The same thing happened in Iconium¹ when Paul and Barnabas² went into the Jewish synagogue³ and spoke in such a way that a large group⁴ of both Jews and Greeks believed.

(Guzik)

Act 14:1-28

Acts 14 - THE CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

A. In the city of Iconium.

1. (Act_14:1) Paul and Barnabas have evangelistic success in Iconium.

Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.

a. **They went together to the synagogue of the Jews:**

Again, notice that they follow the familiar pattern for evangelism, beginning in the Jewish synagogue.

b. **So spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed:** Paul and Barnabas have success among the Jews and the Greeks, presenting the same gospel to both. The fact that **Jews and . . . Greeks believed** shows that Paul preached the same thing to both groups: That salvation is in Jesus, and we appropriate it by our belief (trust in, reliance on) in Him.

i. The success is refreshing, because they had just been kicked out of Pisidian Antioch, after much success there (Act_13:50).

ii. Because Paul was inclined to stay in a region for an extended period of time, strengthening the churches and working where evangelistic efforts had already borne fruit, perhaps we should see the kind of persecution Paul had in Pisidian Antioch as God's way of moving him on to other fields.

2. (Act_14:2-6) Successful ministry in Iconium creates opposition, forcing Paul and Barnabas out of town.

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.

a. **Speaking boldly in the Lord:** Paul and Barnabas did what they always did, they preached boldly despite the opposition, **bearing witness to the word of His grace** and touching others with the power of Jesus .

i. **Granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands:** “For no apostle could work a miracle by himself; nor was any sign or wonder wrought even by the greatest apostle, but by a special grant or dispensation of God. This power was not resident in them at all times.” (Clarke)

b. **Therefore they stayed a long time:** They stayed as long as they could, despite the opposition, leaving only when it was absolutely necessary.

i. Why did Paul and Barnabas decide to stay **a long time** if there was opposition arising? Because they knew that these Christians would need all the grounding they could get to stand strong in a city with much opposition.

c. Paul and Barnabas preached **the word of His grace**, because that is the only word by which both Jews and Gentiles can be saved on an equal basis.

i. “The gospel is here called *the message of his grace* because divine grace is its subject matter.” (Bruce)

d. **A violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, they became aware of it and fled:** When forced to, Paul and Barnabas leave Iconium for Lystra (some twenty miles away) and Derbe. This shows that Paul and Barnabas did not

rush headlong towards martyrdom. They did what they could to preserve their lives.

B. In the cities of Lystra and Derbe.

1. (Act_14:7-10) In Lystra, a lame man is healed.

And they were preaching the gospel there. And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked. *This* man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

a. **And they were preaching the gospel there:** Paul and Barnabas did many miraculous works, one of which is recorded in the following passage. But they were not traveling as miracle workers. Their focus was always **preaching the gospel**.

b. **This man heard Paul speaking:** The crippled man heard Paul preach about Jesus. When he heard about Jesus, he knew that Jesus could touch *his* life. A person can hear God's word, but never come to the place where they receive God's touch personally.

c. Paul saw that this man **had faith to be healed**; God is not obligated to heal because of our faith, but many people do not receive from God simply because they do not have faith.

d. **Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed:** How could Paul "see" this man's faith?

Obviously, God gave him the gift of discernment at that moment to minister to this man. From Paul's boldness, we can also surmise that God gave him the gift of faith, to believe God would heal the man right then and there.

i. "That this lame man had faith was made plain by his ready obedience to Paul's command to stand up." (Bruce) 2.

(Act_14:11-13) The excited crowd in Lystra declares Paul and Barnabas are Greek gods, visiting the earth.

Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language*, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

a. **The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!** These people saw a stupendous miracle happen before their eyes, yet their idea of *who God is* has not changed. Therefore it seemed logical to them to consider Paul and Barnabas gods.

i. Notice that the miracle merely attracted attention, and in a way, it was unwanted attention. The miracle itself saved no one.

b. **Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.** In Greek mythology, it was common for the “gods” to come to earth in human form, though they did not always do so for the good of man.

i. The people in Lystra had a legend that once Zeus and Hermes had visited their land disguised as mortals, and no one gave them any hospitality except for one older couple. In their anger at the people, Zeus and Hermes wiped out the whole population, except for the old couple. No wonder the people of Lystra were so quick to honor Paul and Barnabas!

c. **Hermes** was known as the messenger of the gods, so it made sense to the Lystrians that Paul (the more talkative one) would be **Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.**

d. **Saying in the Lycaonian language:** “The crowd’s use of Lycaonian explains why Paul and Barnabas did not grasp what was afoot until the preparations to pay them divine homage were well advanced.” (Bruce)

i. But when Paul and Barnabas saw **the priest of Zeus, with oxen and garlands . . . intending to sacrifice**, they knew things had gotten out of hand!

3. (Act_14:14-18) Paul appeals to the crowd, asking them to recognize the true God instead of worshipping Paul and Barnabas.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.

a. **They tore their clothes:** They did this for two reasons. First to show that they were completely human, just as the Lycaonians. Second, out of an instinctively Jewish reaction to terrible blasphemy. For Paul and Barnabas, it wasn’t just inconvenient that they were called gods; it was blasphemy.

b. **That you should turn from these useless things:** These were strong words from Paul to people who took their pagan worship seriously, but Paul wasn’t afraid to confront this mob with the truth. And the truth was that their idolatry was wrong.

c. Paul is preaching to a pagan audience, and before he can tell them about Jesus and what He has done, he must turn the hearts of the people **from these useless things to the living God**. Jesus just can’t be “added” to their pagan ways.

d. **To the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them:** Paul calls the Lystrian crowd to consider the real God, the One who stands behind all creation, not one of the lesser (and imaginary) Greek gods.

i. The things Paul mentions in Act_14:17 (**He did good . . . gave us rain from heaven . . . and fruitful seasons . . . filling our hearts with food and gladness**) were just the kind of things these people would think that Zeus would give them. Paul is letting them know these blessings come from the true God who lives in heaven, not from Zeus.

e. God's kindness to all men (in giving rain and fruitful crops) should be seen as a witness of His love and power, something theologians call *common grace*.

i. Paul did not preach to these pagan worshippers the same way he preached to Jews or those acquainted with Judaism. He does not quote the Old Testament to them, but instead appeals to natural revelation, the things which even a pagan can understand by looking at the world around them.

f. **And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them:** even with all this, Paul and Barnabas had an extremely difficult time challenging the wrong conceptions of God held by these Lystrians.

4. (Act_14:19-20 a) Persecution follows Paul.

Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul *and* dragged *him* out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city.

a. **Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came:** These Jews were not content to kick Paul out of their own region (Act_14:5-6); they followed him and brought their persecution with them.

i. Some of these persecuting **Jews from Antioch and Iconium** would have traveled more than one hundred miles just to make Paul miserable!

b. **Having persuaded the multitudes:** They incited the people of Lystra against Paul and Barnabas, and instigated the stoning of Paul. This was obviously an attempt to execute Paul and Barnabas - with the rocks being thrown by

the same people who wanted to worship them a short time before!

i. We are amazed at how fickle the crowd is; apparently, their admiration of the miracle and desire to honor Paul and Barnabas as gods was extremely short-lived.

ii. It is such a dangerous thing for any spiritual leader to cultivate or allow a kind of “hero-worship.” The same people who honor you one day will feel terribly betrayed when you show yourself human.

c. **They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city:** Paul was miraculously preserved here. Some think that he was even actually killed and raised to life again, because stoning was a pretty reliable form of execution.

i. When Paul later says *I bear in my body the marks of Jesus* (Gal_6:17), he may have had in mind the scars from this incident. He certainly later refers to this stoning in 2Co_11:25.

ii. It has been suggested that the heavenly vision described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 took place at this attack. This is possible, but only conjecture.

d. Paul must have thought of Stephen when he was being stoned, and how he had been a part of Stephen’s stoning (Act_7:58 to Act_8:1).

e. **He rose up and went into the city:** When Paul was revived, he did not flee the city that stoned him. Instead he immediately went back into it. He had been driven out of Antioch and Iconium by this traveling mob, and he was going to leave Lystra on his own terms!

i. In Act_16:1, we learn of a young Christian in Lystra and his mother - Timothy. Perhaps Timothy saw all this and was inspired to the high call of the gospel by noticing Paul’s courage and power in ministry.

5. (Act_14:20-21 a) Paul leaves Lystra for the city of Derbe, where they find more evangelistic success.

And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples.

a. **When they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples:** despite the persecution they found in Lystra, the work of God continues. It just continued in a different place, **Derbe**. But Paul and Barnabas continue their work: preaching the gospel and making disciples.

C. The return trip home to Syrian Antioch.

1. (Act_14:21-22) The message of Paul and Barnabas on the return trip.

They returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

a. **Strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith:** As Paul and Barnabas decided to head back home to Antioch, they passed through the cities they had visited before, to strengthen and encourage the Christians in those cities. Paul and Barnabas wanted to do far more than get conversions; they had a passion to make

disciples.

i. How many Christians need **strengthening** in their **souls**! How many need **exhorting . . . to continue in the faith**! It is no small thing to walk with the Lord, year after year, trial after trial. It takes a strong soul and an encouraged faith.

b. How did Paul and Barnabas strengthen and exhort these disciples? By bringing a simple message, born of Paul's personal experience: **We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God**. Paul could preach that message because he had lived that message!

i. Sadly, for many people, this is a forgotten message. They consider any kind of tribulation completely counter-productive to Christian living, failing to note the significant place suffering has in God's plan for us.

2. (Act_14:23) The work of Paul and Barnabas on the way home.

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

a. Paul and Barnabas were committed to not just making new Christians, but in establishing new *churches*, places where these new Christians could grow and be established in the Lord.

b. **When they had appointed elders in every church:** Paul and Barnabas knew that these churches must have proper administration, so they appointed elders in every city where there were Christians.

i. "It has more than once been pointed out that more recent missionary policy would have thought it dangerously idealistic to recognize converts of only a few weeks' standing as leaders in their churches; perhaps Paul and Barnabas were more conscious of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the believing communities." (Bruce) c. **And prayed with fasting:** Paul and Barnabas demonstrated

their great concern for the health of these churches by their prayer and fasting.

d. But in the end, they can only trust in God's ability to keep these churches healthy, having **commended them to the Lord**, because it is in the Lord **they had believed**, not in Paul or Barnabas or the elders. The church belongs to Jesus.

3. (Act_14:24-26) The itinerary of Paul and Barnabas on the way home.

And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.

a. The words **the work which they had completed** are beautiful, yet only partially true. Although the immediate mission was accomplished, the work of planting new churches and strengthening existing ones has never ended.

4. (Act_14:27-28) Paul and Barnabas arrive back in Antioch. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

a. **They reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles:** Their success with evangelism among the Gentiles, and the blessing of God that it demonstrated, showed that the work which was being done in Antioch was not unique. God wanted to replicate this work all over the world.

b. **So they stayed there a long time with the disciples:** Back at their home church in Syrian Antioch, we can assume that Paul and Barnabas took a long break and found plenty of ministry to do back there.

c. The trip was a great success, though not without great obstacles: The difficulty of travel itself, the confrontation with Elymas on Cyprus, the quitting of John Mark, being

driven out of the cities of Antioch and Iconium, the temptation to receive adoration, and being stoned in Lystra. Yet Paul and Barnabas would not be deterred from the work God had them to do.

i. What will it take for you to back down from doing God's will? What kind of temptation or obstacle or opposition will do it? Can we have the heart of Paul and Barnabas and allow nothing to stop us? Nothing stopped Jesus from doing God's will on our behalf; as we look to Him, we won't be stopped either.

ii. *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* (Php_3:12-14)

(Act 14:2) But the Jews who refused to believe⁵ stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds⁶ against the brothers.

(Act 14:3) So they stayed there⁷ for a considerable time, speaking out courageously for the Lord, who testified⁸ to the message⁹ of his grace, granting miraculous signs¹⁰ and wonders to be performed through their hands.

(Act 14:4) But the population¹¹ of the city was divided; some¹² sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles.

(Act 14:5) When both the Gentiles and the Jews (together with their rulers) made¹³ an attempt to mistreat¹⁴ them and stone them,¹⁵

(Act 14:6) Paul and Barnabas¹⁶ learned about it¹⁷ and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra¹⁸ and Derbe¹⁹ and the surrounding region.

(Act 14:7) There²⁰ they continued to proclaim²¹ the good news.

(Act 14:8) ***Paul and Barnabas at Lystra***

In²² Lystra²³ sat a man who could not use his feet,²⁴ lame from birth,²⁵ who had never walked.

(Act 14:9) This man was listening to Paul as he was speaking. When Paul²⁶ stared²⁷ intently at him and saw he had faith to be healed, (Act 14:10) he said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet."²⁸ And the man²⁹ leaped up and began walking.³⁰

(Act 14:11) So when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted³¹ in the Lycaonian language,³² "The gods have come down to us in human form!"³³

(Act 14:12) They began to call³⁴ Barnabas Zeus³⁵ and Paul Hermes,³⁶ because he was the chief speaker.

(Act 14:13) The priest of the temple³⁷ of Zeus,³⁸ located just outside the city, brought bulls³⁹ and garlands⁴⁰ to the city gates; he and the crowds wanted to offer sacrifices to them.⁴¹

(Act 14:14) But when the apostles⁴² Barnabas and Paul heard about⁴³ it, they tore⁴⁴ their clothes and rushed out⁴⁵ into the crowd, shouting,⁴⁶

(Act 14:15) "Men, why are you doing these things? We too are men, with human natures⁴⁷ just like you! We are proclaiming the good news to you, so that you should turn⁴⁸ from these worthless⁴⁹ things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth,⁵⁰ the sea, and everything that is in them.

(Act 14:16) In⁵¹ past⁵² generations he allowed all the nations⁵³ to go their own ways,

(Act 14:17) yet he did not leave himself without a witness by doing good,⁵⁴ by giving you rain from heaven⁵⁵ and fruitful seasons, satisfying you⁵⁶ with food and your hearts with joy."⁵⁷

(Act 14:18) Even by saying⁵⁸ these things, they scarcely persuaded⁵⁹ the crowds not to offer sacrifice to them.

(Act 14:19) But Jews came from Antioch⁶⁰ and Iconium,⁶¹ and after winning⁶² the crowds over, they stoned⁶³ Paul and dragged him out of the city, presuming him to be dead.

(Act 14:20) But after the disciples had surrounded him, he got up and went back⁶⁴ into the city. On⁶⁵ the next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.⁶⁶

(Act 14:21) ***Paul and Barnabas Return to Antioch in Syria***

After they had proclaimed the good news in that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra,⁶⁷ to Iconium,⁶⁸ and to Antioch.⁶⁹

(Act 14:22) They strengthened⁷⁰ the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue⁷¹ in the faith, saying, "We must enter the kingdom⁷² of God through many persecutions."⁷³

(Act 14:23) When they had appointed elders⁷⁴ for them in the various churches,⁷⁵ with prayer and fasting⁷⁶ they entrusted them to the protection⁷⁷ of the Lord in whom they had believed.

(Act 14:24) Then they passed through⁷⁸ Pisidia and came into Pamphylia,⁷⁹

(Act 14:25) and when they had spoken the word⁸⁰ in Perga,⁸¹ they went down to Attalia.⁸²

(Act 14:26) From there they sailed back to Antioch,⁸³ where they had been commended⁸⁴ to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.⁸⁵

(Act 14:27) When they arrived and gathered the church together, they reported⁸⁶ all the things God⁸⁷ had done with them, and that he had opened a door⁸⁸ of faith for the Gentiles.

(Act 14:28) So they spent⁸⁹ considerable⁹⁰ time with the disciples.

(Act 15:1) ***The Jerusalem Council***

Now some men came down from Judea¹ and began to teach the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised² according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

(Guzik)

Act 15:1-41

Acts 15 - THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

A. The dispute between the men from Judea and Paul and Barnabas.

1. (Act_15:1) The men **from Judea** state their case.

And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

a. **Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."** These Jewish Christians (often called "Judaizers") taught that Gentiles may become Christians, but only after first becoming Jews, and submitting to all Jewish rituals, including circumcision.

i. It was very difficult for some Jewish Christians to accept that Gentiles could be brought into the church as "equal partners" without first coming through the law of Moses. "It was one thing to accept the occasional God-fearer into the church, someone already in sympathy with Jewish ways; it was quite another to welcome large numbers of Gentiles who had no regard for the law and no intention of keeping it." (Williams)

b. These Christians were **from Judea**, and were not content to keep their beliefs to themselves, but felt compelled to persuade other Christians. They **taught the brethren**, coming all the way to Antioch to preach this message.

i. By their teaching, these **certain men from Judea** were passing a negative judgment on all of Paul and Barnabas' missionary endeavors. On their recent missionary journey, they had founded churches among the Gentiles without bringing them under the Law of Moses. These **certain men from Judea** said Paul and Barnabas were all wrong!

ii. When in the city of Antioch in Pisidia, Paul preached this message: *And by Him [Jesus] everyone who believes is*

justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses (Act_13:39). These **certain men . . . down from Judea** would have objected, saying “Jesus saves us, but only after we have done all we can do to keep the Law of Moses.” But Paul taught a man could only be right with God on the basis of what Jesus had done!

c. **You cannot be saved:** This was not a side issue; it had to do with salvation itself. This was not a matter where there could be disagreement among believers, with some believing you must be under the law, and some believing it wasn’t important. This was an issue that went to the core of Christianity, and it had to be resolved.

i. We can just imagine how Satan wanted to take advantage of this situation. First, he wanted the false doctrine of works righteousness to succeed. But even if it didn’t, Satan wanted a costly, bitter doctrinal war to complete split and sour the church. This may be the greatest threat to the work of the gospel seen in the Book of Acts!

2. (Act_15:2-4) Paul and Barnabas respond to the teaching of the men from Judea.

Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.

a. **Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them:** Their first response was to persuade. We can imagine there was **no small dissension and dispute with them** indeed. These two who had seen God work so powerfully through the Gentiles would not abandon that work easily.

i. In this, Paul and Barnabas show the hearts of true shepherds: To confront and dispute with those who insist on promoting false doctrines in the church.

b. **They determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem:**

When persuasion did not end the issue, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to have the matter settled by **the apostles and elders**. They couldn't just agree to disagree on this issue, because it was at the core of what meant to be a follower of Jesus.

i. Who are the **they who determined that Paul and Barnabas** should go to Jerusalem to determine this question? It seems to speak of the church collectively in Antioch, where this false doctrine was being promoted.

This is indicated by the statement that they were **sent on their way by the church**.

c. **They caused great joy to all the brethren:** As Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem, they found plenty of other Christians who rejoiced at what God had done among the Gentiles. This is in contrast to the certain men from Judea.

3. (Act_15:5) The men from Judea re-state their teaching.

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses."

a. **Some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up:** We see that many of these Judaizers were Christians who had been **Pharisees**. The **Pharisees** were renowned for their high regard for the law, and their scrupulous observance of the law.

i. If the Pharisees believed anything, they believed one could be justified before God by keeping the law. For a Pharisee to really be a Christian, it would take more than an acknowledgment that Jesus was Messiah; he would have to forsake his attempts to justify himself by the keeping of the law and accept the work of Jesus as the basis of his justification.

ii. In Lystra, Paul and Barnabas would not allow the pagans to merely “add” Jesus to their pantheon of Roman gods. The commanded that they had to turn from their vain gods to the true God (Act_14:14-15). These Pharisees who had become Christians must do the same thing: Turn from their efforts to earn their way before God by keeping the law, and look to Jesus. You can’t just “add” Jesus and now say “Jesus helps me to justify myself through keeping the law.”

iii. Paul himself was a former Pharisee (Php_3:5) who became a Christian. But he knew that Jesus didn’t help him do what a Pharisee did, only better. He knew that Jesus *was* his salvation, not *the way* to his salvation. Paul wrote: *knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.* (Gal_2:16)

b. It is necessary or circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses: These former Pharisees were teaching two things. First, Gentile converts must be *initiated* into Judaism through circumcision. Second, that Gentile converts must *live under the law of Moses* if they are to be saved, and embraced into the Christian community.

i. Basically, their teaching was: “Gentiles are free to come to Jesus. We welcome them and want them to come to Jesus. But they have to come through the Law of Moses in order to come to Jesus. Paul and Barnabas, among others, have been allowing Gentiles to come to Jesus without first coming through the Law of Moses.”

c. We can imagine how they would have even made a case from the Old Testament for this teaching. They might have said Israel has *always* been God’s chosen people and that Gentiles must become part of Israel if they want to be part of God’s people.

i. Passages **the Pharisees who believed** might quote in defense of their position are Exo_12:48-49 and Isa_56:6. These passages might be quoted to say that the covenant the Gentiles were invited to join was a covenant of circumcision.

B. The Jerusalem council.

1. (Act_15:6-11) In the midst of a great dispute, the apostle Peter speaks to the issue.

Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”

a. **Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.** Here, we see the church coming together to decide the issue. They didn’t just let the issue sit, nor leave it up to the conscience of each believer.

i. The question raised by the Jerusalem council was immense: Are Christians saved by faith alone, or by a *combination* of faith and obedience of the Law of Moses? Is the work of Jesus by itself enough to save the one who trusts in Jesus, or must we add our work to Jesus’ work in order to be saved?

ii. With significant doctrinal issues today, perhaps this sort of public “trial” of doctrine would be beneficial.

b. **And when there had been much dispute:** This would have been amazing to see! Christians serious enough about the truth to **dispute** for it! In the midst of this, Peter, as one

of the leading apostles, **rose up** to make his opinion known on the matter .

c. **Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago:** Peter begins with a history lesson, recounting the work God had already done. He then makes the point that **God** had fully received the Gentiles apart from their being circumcised (**God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us**). If God had **acknowledged** these Gentiles as full partners in His work, why shouldn't the church? If God received them, so should the church!

i. In saying, "**Made no distinction between us and them,**" Peter makes an important observation. It comes straight from his vision of the clean and unclean animals, from which God taught him this principle: *God has shown to me that I should not call any man common or unclean* (Act_10:28). Those *of the sect of the Pharisees who believed* thought that the Gentiles were inherently "common" (in the sense of "unholy") or "unclean," and had to be made holy and clean by submitting to the Law of Moses.

d. **Purifying their hearts by faith.** Peter shows *how* the heart is purified: **by faith**, not by keeping of the law. If they were purified by faith, then there was no need to be purified by submitting to ceremonies found in the Law of Moses.

i. Christians are not only *saved* by faith; they are *purified* by faith also!

e. **Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?** Peter wisely answers another objection. One might ask, "What is the *harm* in bringing Gentiles under the Law of Moses?" Peter was right on the mark when he observed that the law was **a yoke** which **neither our fathers nor we were able to bear**.

i. This is demonstrated by a brief look at Israel's history. At the birth of the nation at Mount Sinai, they broke the law by worshipping the golden calf. At the end of Old Testament

history, they are still breaking the law by breaking the Sabbath and marrying pagan women (Nehemiah 13). From beginning to end, Israel could not bear the **yoke** of the law.

ii. Those *of the sect of the Pharisees who believed* were making a critical mistake. They were looking at Israel's history under the law with eyes of nostalgia, not truth. If they would have carefully and truthfully considered Israel's failure under the law, they would not have been so quick to put Gentiles under the law also.

iii. Paul makes the same argument in the book of Gal_3:2-3. If the law does not save us, why would we return to it as the principle by which we live? In light of the finished work of Jesus, it is offensive to God to go back to the law.

This is why Peter asked, "**why do you test God?**"

f. **But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.** Peter concludes with the observation that it is **through grace** that all are saved - both Jew and Gentile - and not by obedience to the law. If we are saved by grace, then we are not saved by grace *and* law-keeping.

i. Peter also insists there is only one way of salvation: **We [Jews] shall be saved in the same manner as they [Gentiles].** Jewish Christians were not saved, even in part, by their law-keeping; they were saved the same way Gentiles were: **Through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

2. (Act_15:12) Paul and Barnabas tell of their work among the Gentiles, supporting Peter's claim that God is doing a work among them.

Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

a. **Then all the multitude kept silent and listened:** This shows that even though *there had been much dispute*, these men were all of an honorable heart. They were willing to listen, and to be persuaded if wrong.

b. Declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles:

Barnabas and Paul confirm Peter's previous point. Essentially, they are saying "*God* has accepted the Gentiles, should not we as well?"

3. (Act_15:13-21) James, the brother of Jesus, speaks to the issue, supporting what Peter and Paul had said.

And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men *and* brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: 'After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things.' Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

a. James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me." This James is not the apostle James, whose martyrdom is recorded in Act_12:2. This is the one traditionally known as James the Just - the half-brother of Jesus (Mat_13:15), brother of Jude (Jud_1:1), and author of the book of James (Jam_1:1).

b. God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people: James begins by insisting God had a **people** among the Gentiles. This would astound a religious Jew in that day!

i. The Greek word for **Gentiles** (it could also be translated *nations*) is *ethne*. The Greek word for **people** in this passage

is *laos*. The Jews considered themselves a *laos* of God, and never among the *ethne*. For them *ethne* and *laos* were contrasting words. So, it would be challenging for them to hear that **God at the first visited the Gentiles (*ethne*) to take out of them a people (*laos*).**

ii. “The paradox inherent in the contrast between *Gentiles* (or *nations*) and *people* is striking, since the latter term was often used of the Jews as the people of God in contrast to the Gentiles. Now it is being urged that God’s people includes the Gentiles.” (Marshall)

c. **With this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:** James will judge this new work of God by the way any work of God should be judged. James will look to what **is written**.

i. **Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name:** In this passage James quotes (Amo_9:11-12), it actually says that salvation will come to the Gentiles. This demonstrates that what God is doing among the Gentiles has a *Biblical* foundation.

ii. Today, many things are considered *Biblical* if they merely fail to contradict something in the Word, even though they may have no root in the Word of God whatsoever. An outside authority would settle this debate. The outside authority was God’s Word.

iii. “Councils have no authority in the church unless it can be shown that their conclusions are in accord with Scripture.” (Stott)

d. **I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down:** When James quotes the prophecy in Amo_9:11-12 about rebuilding the fallen tabernacle of David, he remembers that the Judaism of his day had **fallen down** in the sense that it had rejected its Messiah. Now God wants to rebuild that work, focusing on a church made up of both Jew and Gentile.

i. **All the Gentiles who are called by My name:** When God says there are Gentiles who are called by His name, He

is saying they stay Gentiles. They are not Gentiles who have been made Jews. Therefore, Gentiles do not need to become Jews and under the law to be saved!

e. **Therefore I judge** implies that James had a position of high authority in the church. He was probably respected as the “senior pastor” of the church at Jerusalem.

ii. The Greek presents it even more strongly as “I determine” or “I resolve” (Expositor’s). In addition, when the decision of James was published, it was presented as the mutual decision of all present (Act_15:25 : *I t seemed good to us*). Clearly, James’ leadership was supported by all present.

iii. “The rest either *argued* on the subject, or gave their *opinion*; James alone pronounced the *definitive sentence*.” (Clarke)

f. What did James decide? **We should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God.**

James essentially says, “Let them alone. They are turning to God, and **we should not trouble** them.” At the bottom line, James decided that Peter, Barnabas, and Paul were correct, and that those *of the sect of the Pharisees who believed* were wrong.

g. **But that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood:** James’ decision that Gentile believers should not be under the Mosaic Law is also tempered by practical instruction. The idea was that it was important that Gentile believers not act in a way that would antagonize the Jewish community **in every city** and destroy the church’s witness among Jews.

i. If the decision is that one does not have to be Jewish to be a Christian, it must also be declared that one does not need to forsake the Law of Moses to be a Christian.

h. **To abstain from things polluted by idols . . . from things strangled, and from blood:** These three commands have to do with the eating habits of Gentile Christians. Though they were not bound under the Law of

Moses, they were bound under the Law of Love. The Law of Love tells them, “don’t unnecessarily antagonize your Jewish neighbors, both in and out of the church.”

i. **To abstain from . . . sexual immorality:** When James declares that they forbid the Gentile Christians to **abstain from . . . sexual immorality**, we shouldn’t think that it means common sex outside of marriage, which all Christians (Jew or Gentile) recognized as wrong. Instead, James is directing these Gentiles living in such close fellowship with the Jewish believers to observe the specific marriage regulations required by Leviticus 18, which prohibited marriages between most family relations. This was something that Jews would abhor, but most Gentiles would think little of.

j. Gentile Christians had the “right” to eat meat sacrificed to idols, to continue their marriage practices, and to eat food without a kosher bleeding, because these were aspects of the Mosaic law they definitely were not under. However, they are encouraged (demanded?) to lay down their “rights” in these matters as a display of love to their Jewish brethren.

i. “All four of the requested abstentions related to ceremonial laws laid down in Leviticus 17, 18, and three of them concerned dietary matters which could inhibit Jewish-Gentile common meals.” (Stott)

4. (Act 15:22-29) A letter of decision is drafted.

Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this *letter* by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.

Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “*You must* be circumcised and keep the law”; to whom we gave no *such* commandment; it seemed good to us, being

assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.

Farewell.

a. It pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church: Much credit goes to the *certain men* of Act_15:1, who allowed themselves to be convinced by the evidence from the Scriptures and by the confirmation of the Holy Spirit.

They all agreed!

i. We can almost admire the *certain men* of Act_15:1, because they boldly stated their convictions, even though their convictions were wrong. But even more admirable is the way they are willing to be taught and shown they are wrong. A teachable spirit is a precious thing!

b. To send chosen men of their own company to Antioch: The Jerusalem council wisely sends two members of its own community (probably Jewish Christians themselves) with Paul and Barnabas back **to Antioch**, the place where the whole dispute arose.

c. They wrote this letter by them: The letter gives the express decision of the Jerusalem council, that Gentiles should consider themselves under no obligation to the rituals of Judaism, except the sensitivity which love demands, so as to preserve the fellowship of Jewish and Gentile believers.

i. **To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:** This letter is written specifically to these churches where Jews and Gentiles mixed together in this tension; it was not addressed to every Gentile congregation.

d. **For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us:** Who made the decision at the Jerusalem council? When the apostolic letter says **it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us**, it makes it clear that it was the Holy Spirit who decided the matter. Significantly, the Holy Spirit made the decision through the decisive leadership of James (who declared, **“Therefore I judge,”** Act_15:19).

e. Therefore, the issue is settled here in the infancy of Christianity, and for all time: We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, not by any conformity to the law, and such obedience comes as a result of true faith, *after* the issue of salvation has been settled.

C. Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch.

1. (Act_15:30-31) A joyful reception among the Gentile Christians at the church of Antioch.

So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter.

When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.

a. **When they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter:** We can imagine how these Gentile Christians felt, wondering how the decision might come forth. Would the council in Jerusalem decide that they really were not saved after all because they had not submitted to circumcision and the Law of Moses?

b. **When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement:** How relieved they were to see that the principle of grace had been preserved! That heard that they *were* saved and right with God after all!

2. (Act_15:32-35) The work of the gospel continues in Antioch.

Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. And after they had stayed *there* for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles.

However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

a. The *certain men* who had come from Judea to Antioch (Act_15:1) had the potential to ruin the work of God in Antioch and beyond. But because the situation was handled correctly, the brethren were strengthened and the word of God continued to go forth.

b. **Judas and Silas** serve well in Antioch as visiting ministers from Jerusalem. Then **Judas** returned, leaving **Silas** in Antioch for future ministry.

D. The contention over John Mark.

1. (Act_15:36) Paul suggests that he and Barnabas return to all the cities where they planted churches in the first missionary trip.

Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are doing."

a. **And see how they are doing:** This shows Paul had a real pastor's heart. He was not content to merely plant churches without seeing them carefully nurtured and growing in the faith.

b. Paul had the heart of both an obstetrician (bringing people into the body of Christ) and a pediatrician (growing people up in the body of Christ).

2. (Act_15:37-41) Paul and Barnabas divide over the issue of taking John Mark with them.

Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

a. **John called Mark:** John Mark had previously left the missionary party under less than honorable circumstances (Act_13:13). This probably made Paul unwilling to trust him on future endeavors.

b. **Barnabas was determined . . . But Paul insisted:** Luke does not give us a clue as to who was “right” and who was “wrong” between Paul and Barnabas. But it is never good when personal disputes flare up among those serving in the ministry.

i. **Then the contention became so sharp:** Wherever there is **sharp . . . contention**, *someone* is wrong, and usually there is wrong on both sides. There can be no way *both* Paul and Barnabas were each walking in the Spirit on this issue!

ii. The relationship between Paul and Barnabas was probably also strained when Barnabas sided with the Judaizers in Antioch when Peter came to visit (Gal_2:13).

c. Since Barnabas was John Mark’s cousin (Col_4:10), and because Barnabas had such an encouraging, accepting character (Act_4:36; Act_9:26-27), it is easy to see why he would be more understanding towards John Mark.

d. **They parted from one another:** So, Paul (accompanied by Silas) and Barnabas (accompanied by Mark) split, each going out to different fields of ministry.

i. It is hard to know if their personal relationship was strained for a prolonged period. As Christians, we are commanded to resolve relationship problems with others before we present ministry to God (Mat_5:23-24). It is always wrong to step over people in the name of ministry, and when it happens it must be made right.

ii. There is no doubt God used this division; but this can never be casually used as an excuse for carnal division.

God can redeem good out of evil, yet we are all held accountable for the evil we do, even if God ends up bringing good out of the evil. Either Paul or Barnabas - probably both - had to get this right with God and each other.

iii. "But this example of God's providence may not be used as an excuse for Christian quarreling." (Stott) e. Later, Paul came to minister with John Mark and to value his contributions to the work of God (Col_4:10; Phm_1:24; 2Ti_4:11). We don't know if it was Mark who changed or Paul who changed. Probably God had a work to do in both of them!

f. **Strengthening the churches:** This was Paul's ministry, in addition to evangelism. New Christians needed strong churches to grow and mature in.

(Act 15:2) When Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate³ with them, the church⁴ appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others from among them to go up to meet with⁵ the apostles and elders in Jerusalem⁶ about this point of disagreement.⁷

(Act 15:3) So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia⁸ and Samaria, they were relating at length⁹ the conversion of the Gentiles and bringing great joy¹⁰ to all the brothers.

(Act 15:4) When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received¹¹ by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported¹² all the things God had done with them.¹³

(Act 15:5) But some from the religious party of the Pharisees¹⁴ who had believed stood up and said, "It is necessary¹⁵ to circumcise the Gentiles¹⁶ and to order them to observe¹⁷ the law of Moses."

(Act 15:6) Both the apostles and the elders met together to deliberate¹⁸ about this matter.

(Act 15:7) After there had been much debate,¹⁹ Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that some time ago²⁰ God chose²¹

me to preach to the Gentiles so they would hear the message²² of the gospel²³ and believe.²⁴

(Act 15:8) And God, who knows the heart,²⁵ has testified²⁶ to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to

us,²⁷

(Act 15:9) and he made no distinction²⁸ between them and us, cleansing²⁹ their hearts by faith.

(Act 15:10) So now why are you putting God to the test³⁰ by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke³¹ that neither our ancestors³²

nor we have been able to bear?

(Act 15:11) On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through³³ the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they are."³⁴

(Act 15:12) The whole group kept quiet³⁵ and listened to Barnabas and Paul while they explained all the miraculous signs³⁶ and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

(Act 15:13) After they stopped speaking,³⁷ James replied,³⁸ "Brothers, listen to me.

(Act 15:14) Simeon³⁹ has explained⁴⁰ how God first concerned himself⁴¹ to select⁴² from among the Gentiles⁴³ a people for his name.

(Act 15:15) The⁴⁴ words of the prophets agree⁴⁵ with this, as it is written,

(Act 15:16) ' **After this** ⁴⁶ **I** ⁴⁷ **will return,**
and I will rebuild the fallen tent ⁴⁸ **of David;**
I will rebuild its ruins and restore ⁴⁹ **it,**

(Act 15:17) **so that the rest of humanity** ⁵⁰ **may seek the Lord,**

namely, ⁵¹ **all the Gentiles** ⁵² **I have called to be my own,'** ⁵³ **says the Lord,** ⁵⁴ *who makes these things* (Act 15:18) *known* ⁵⁵ *from long ago.* ⁵⁶

(Act 15:19) "Therefore I conclude⁵⁷ that we should not cause extra difficulty⁵⁸ for those among the Gentiles⁵⁹ who are turning to God, (Act 15:20) but that we should write them a letter⁶⁰ telling them to abstain⁶¹ from things defiled⁶² by idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled⁶³ and from blood.

(Act 15:21) For Moses has had those who proclaim him in every town from ancient times,⁶⁴ because he is read aloud⁶⁵ in the synagogues⁶⁶ every Sabbath."

(Act 15:22) Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided⁶⁷ to send men chosen from among them, Judas called Barsabbas and Silas,⁶⁸ leaders among the brothers, to Antioch⁶⁹ with Paul and Barnabas.

(Act 15:23) They sent this letter with them:⁷⁰

From the apostles⁷¹ and elders, your brothers,⁷² to the Gentile brothers and sisters⁷³ in Antioch,⁷⁴ Syria,⁷⁵ and Cilicia, greetings!

(Act 15:24) Since we have heard that some have gone out from among us with no orders from us and have confused⁷⁶ you, upsetting⁷⁷

your minds⁷⁸ by what they said,⁷⁹

(Act 15:25) we have unanimously⁸⁰ decided⁸¹ to choose men to send to you along with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul, (Act 15:26) who⁸² have risked their lives⁸³ for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁸⁴

(Act 15:27) Therefore we are sending⁸⁵ Judas and Silas⁸⁶ who will tell you these things themselves in person.⁸⁷

(Act 15:28) For it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us⁸⁸ not to place any greater burden on you than these necessary rules:⁸⁹

(Act 15:29) that you abstain from meat that has been sacrificed to idols⁹⁰ and from blood and from what has been strangled⁹¹ and from sexual immorality.⁹² If you keep yourselves from doing these things,⁹³ you will do well. Farewell.⁹⁴

(Act 15:30) So when they were dismissed,⁹⁵ they went down to Antioch,⁹⁶ and after gathering the entire group⁹⁷ together, they delivered the letter.

(Act 15:31) When they read it aloud,⁹⁸ the people⁹⁹ rejoiced at its encouragement.¹⁰⁰

(Act 15:32) Both Judas and Silas, who were prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with a long speech.¹⁰¹

(Act 15:33) After¹⁰² they had spent some time there,¹⁰³ they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them.¹⁰⁴

(Act 15:34) *(TEXT OMITTED)*

(Act 15:35) But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch,¹⁰⁵ teaching and proclaiming (along with many others)¹⁰⁶ the word of the Lord.¹⁰⁷

(Act 15:36) ***Paul and Barnabas Part Company***

After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's return¹⁰⁸ and visit the brothers in every town where we proclaimed the word of the Lord¹⁰⁹ to see how they are doing."¹¹⁰

(Act 15:37) Barnabas wanted to bring John called Mark along with them too,

(Act 15:38) but Paul insisted¹¹¹ that they should not take along this one who had left them in Pamphylia¹¹² and had not accompanied them in the work.

(Act 15:39) They had¹¹³ a sharp disagreement,¹¹⁴ so that they parted company. Barnabas took along¹¹⁵ Mark and sailed away to Cyprus,¹¹⁶

(Act 15:40) but Paul chose Silas and set out, commended¹¹⁷ to the grace of the Lord by the brothers and sisters.¹¹⁸

(Act 15:41) He passed through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening¹¹⁹ the churches.

(Act 16:1) ***Timothy Joins Paul and Silas***

He also came to Derbe¹ and to Lystra.² A disciple³ named Timothy was there, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer,⁴

but whose father was a Greek.⁵

(Guzik)

Act 16:1-40

Acts 16 - THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY BEGINS

A. From the city of Derbe to Troas.

1. (Act_16:1-5) At Derbe and Lystra.

Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the* son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father *was* Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

a. Paul began this missionary journey having come from Antioch. First, he did the work of *strengthening the churches* through the regions of Syria and Cilicia (Act_15:40-41).

b. **Then he came to Derbe and Lystra:** Now he arrives in **Derbe**, where he had great success on his first missionary journey (Act_14:20-21), and in **Lystra**, where a crowd tried to honor Paul and Barnabas as pagan gods on the first missionary journey (Act_14:8-20).

i. The first missionary journey finished about five years before the events of this chapter. Paul was anxious to see for himself how the work of the Lord continued among these churches he founded five years before.

c. **A certain disciple was there, named Timothy:** In the time since Paul had been to Lystra, a young man **named Timothy** had been serving the Lord (**He was well spoken of by the brethren**). Timothy had a believing mother with a Jewish background (**son of a certain Jewish woman who believed**), but an unbelieving **Greek** father.

i. The last time Paul was in Lystra, they first worshipped him as a god and then tried to kill him by stoning (Act_14:11-20). Paul's courage and wisdom in the face of these obstacles built a great legacy in people like Timothy.

d. Paul was impressed enough with Timothy that **Paul wanted to have him go on with him**. This shows God's provision, because John Mark and Barnabas just left Paul (Act_15:36-41). No single worker in God's kingdom is irreplaceable. When a Barnabas leaves (for whatever reason), God has a Timothy to **go on with him**.

e. **And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews in that region**: Paul had Timothy **circumcised**, not for the sake of his salvation (Paul would never do so) but so there would be less to hinder ministry among the Jews.

i. "By Jewish law Timothy was a Jew, because he was the son of Jewish mother, but because he was uncircumcised he was technically an apostate Jew. If Paul wished to maintain his links with the synagogue, he could not be seen to countenance apostasy." (Bruce)

ii. In Acts 15, Paul argued strongly that it was not necessary for converts to come under the Law of Moses for salvation. At the time Paul met Timothy, he was delivering the news of this decree which came out of the Acts 15

council (**as they went through the cities, the delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem**).

So why is Paul telling Timothy to be circumcised?

Doesn't this contradict the decree **which was determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem**? Not at all. Paul would have never told Timothy to become circumcised for the sake of legalism. But Paul would do things for the sake of love that he would not do for the sake of trying to please God through legalism.

f. **So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily**: Paul's work was successful because his first interest was in strengthening the churches. Strong churches will naturally increase in number daily, without relying on carnal and manipulative methods.

2. (Act_16:6-10) God directs Paul to the region of Macedonia.

Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

a. **They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia:** After strengthening the churches in the region, Paul seeks to go next to the immediate west, towards the important city of Ephesus. But Paul was **forbidden by the Holy Spirit** to go there.

i. How could the Holy Spirit possibly forbid the preaching of the word in Asia? Because there was a work being orchestrated by the Spirit of God, and Paul wasn't the right person in the right place at the right time to begin bringing the gospel to the Roman Province of Asia Minor. There was certainly nothing wrong with Paul's *desire* to **preach the word in Asia**; but it wasn't God's timing, so it was **forbidden by the Holy Spirit**.

ii. How exactly did the Holy Spirit forbid them? It is difficult to say exactly how the Holy Spirit said *no*; it may have been through a word of prophecy, or by an inward speaking of the Holy Spirit, or by circumstances. One way or another, Paul and his company got the message.

iii. **Asia** does not refer to the Far East as we know it today. It refers to the Roman Province of Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey.

b. **They tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them:** After the attempt to go to Asia, Paul sought to go north into **Bithynia**, but is again prevented by the Holy Spirit. So, **they came down to Troas**.

i. Paul didn't set out to go to **Troas**. It was at least the third choice for him. But it was the Holy Spirit's plan to lead him there. Paul, beautifully responsive to the Holy Spirit, is willing to lay down his will and plans for the direction that the Holy Spirit brings.

ii. Paul is being guided by hindrance. The Holy Spirit often guides as much by the *closing* of doors as He does by the *opening* of doors.

c. **And a vision appeared to Paul in the night:** In Troas, God makes Paul's direction clear. In **a vision**, Paul is "invited" to the region of Macedonia, westward across the Aegean Sea.

i. This moves Paul and his missionary team from the continent of Asia to the continent of Europe; this was the first missionary endeavor to Europe.

ii. The wisdom and greatness of God's plan is beginning to unfold. In Paul's mind, he wanted to reach a few cities in his region. But God wanted to give Paul a continent to win for Jesus Christ.

d. **A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."** The Macedonian man wanted **help**. So Paul went to bring Macedonia the gospel!

i. The greatest help we can bring anyone is the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ! It is good for us to bring other help along with the gospel, but without the gospel, what real help have you given them?

e. **Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go:** Paul did not hesitate to answer the call of the Macedonian man. Paul's missionary team did not hesitate to follow him on the basis of this call. This was a strong, godly man, leading a strong, godly team!

i. God still calls people to the mission field. Perhaps many today will encounter a "Macedonia man" who will call them out to the mission field. Would to God that those who hear a

“Macedonian man” today will respond the way Paul and his team responded!

f. **Immediately we sought to go:** The shift from *they* (*they came down to Troas*, Act_16:8) to **we** in this verse probably means that Luke joined the band of missionaries in Troas. Perhaps he even came as Paul’s personal doctor.

i. Now we see another reason why **they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia**. We see another reason why **the Spirit did not permit them** to go into Bithynia. God wanted Paul and his team to go to Troas and pick up a doctor named Luke. If God wouldn’t have said “no” to Paul these two times, we would not have a gospel and a Book of Acts written by Luke!

ii. At the time, Paul probably had no idea of the greatness of God’s purpose. God wanted to give him a continent for Jesus, to give him a personal doctor, and to give all of us the man whom God would use to write more of the New Testament than anyone else did. God knows what He is doing when he says, “No.”

B. Paul’s work in the Macedonian city of Philippi.

1. (Act_16:11-15) The conversion of Lydia.

Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” So she persuaded us.

a. **Sailing from Troas:** Paul and his missionary team (now including Luke) had to sail across the Aegean Sea, from the

continent of Asia to the continent of Europe. This was a big step, perhaps bigger than Paul even knew!

b. **From there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia:** Paul's general strategy was to plant churches in the major cities. He knew that it was easier for the gospel to spread *from* these cities than *to* these cities.

c. **On the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made:** The fact that the Jews had no synagogue and met by the river means that there were not many Jewish men in Philippi.

i. "Had there been ten Jewish men, they would have sufficed to constitute a synagogue. No number of women would compensate for the absence of even one man necessary to make up the quorum of ten." (Bruce)

d. **Lydia . . . was a seller of purple:** Anyone who **was a seller of purple** dealt in a valued, luxurious product. The dyes used for making purple were expensive and highly regarded.

i. **From the city of Thyatira: Thyatira** was well known as a center for this purple dye and fabric made from it.

Later, there was a church in Thyatira also, and it was one of the seven churches addressed in Revelation (Rev_2:18-29).

e. **The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul:** Before Lydia was converted (as demonstrated by her baptism), **the Lord opened her heart**. This is a work God must do in all who believe, because as Jesus said, *no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him* (Joh_6:44).

i. Therefore, the most important element in evangelism is imploring God through prayer to *open hearts*, for without this there can be no genuine conversion.

f. **She begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay."**

Immediately, Lydia set about doing good. Her hospitality is touching and wonderful example.

2. (Act_16:16-18 a) A demon-possessed slave girl follows Paul.

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days.

a. **A certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination . . . brought her masters much profit:** This girl, through demon possessed, was a source of profit for her owners as a fortune teller, because demons would give her supernatural insight into the lives of others.

i. Today, much of what fortune-tellers and psychics do is only a money making sham. But when it is true and has a supernatural origin (as opposed to clever, insightful guessing), there is no doubt that it is inspired by demons.

There are still those today who are **possessed with a spirit of divination**.

ii. But how can demons tell the future? Because demons are created beings, not "gods" themselves, we surmise that they can not read minds, nor actually foretell the future. But they can read and predict human behavior, and can attempt to steer events towards a previously predicted conclusion.

b. **This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."**

The demon-possessed slave girl "preaches" for Paul, giving a demonic "testimony" to their divine credentials and the message that they preach, and **this she did for many days**.

3. (Act_16:18 b) Paul casts the demon out of the slave girl.

But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of

her.” And he came out that very hour.

a. **But Paul, greatly annoyed:** Why was Paul **greatly annoyed**? Didn’t he appreciate the free “advertising”? No, because he didn’t appreciate the source, and could do quite nicely without demonic approval of his ministry.

i. Paul knew that a man will be identified by both his friends and his enemies, and could do without a demonic “letter of reference.”

ii. In this, Paul is like Jesus, who often told demons to be silent, even when they were telling the truth about Him (Mat_8:28-34, Mar_3:11-12).

b. **I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her:** Jesus cast out demons with His own authority. Paul is careful to speak to demons only in the authority of Jesus Christ.

c. **And he came out that very hour:** The idea behind **that very hour** is that the demon came out immediately. But Jesus said that some demons would be more difficult to cast out than others would (Mat_17:21).

i. Bruce translates the phrase with *It came out there and then*. He comments: “The words had scarcely left his lips when she was released from its power.”

4. (Act_16:19-24) Paul and Silas are arrested, beaten, and imprisoned for delivering the slave-girl from her demonic possession.

But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.” Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge,

he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

a. The whole mess was instigated because **her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone**. The masters care nothing for the girl herself, only for their ability to exploit her demonic possession for money. They were occultic “pimps,” prostituting her spiritually.

b. **They seized Paul and Silas**: Paul and Silas were singled out not only because there were the leaders of the evangelistic group, but also, by their appearance, they were the most obviously Jewish. This is indicated by how they began their accusation: **“These men, being Jews.”**

i. Luke was a Gentile, and Timothy was only half Jewish. Paul and Silas *looked* Jewish, and “Anti-Jewish sentiment lay very near the surface in pagan antiquity.” (Bruce)

c. **Exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe**. Their charges are vague, simply accusing Paul and Silas of being troublemakers. But those vague charges were enough, because both the **multitude** and the **magistrates** were biased against Paul and Silas. They were biased because of their Jewish appearance, and because they assumed Paul and Silas were not Roman citizens.

i. In the Roman Empire, there were two very different laws: one for citizens of the Roman Empire, and one for those who were not citizens. Roman citizens had specific civil rights which were zealously guarded. Non-citizens had no civil rights, and were subject to the whims of both the **multitude** and the **magistrates**.

ii. Since they assumed Paul and Barnabas were not Roman citizens, they were offended that these obviously Jewish men would harass Roman citizens with their strange religion of a crucified Saviour. As well, the **multitude** and the

magistrates felt free to abuse Paul and Silas because they assumed they were not Roman citizens.

iii. “There was great indignation that Roman citizens should be molested by strolling peddlers of an outlandish religion. Such people had to be taught to know their proper place and not trouble their betters.” (Bruce) d. **When they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison:** After being severely beaten, Paul and Silas are imprisoned in maximum-security conditions (**commanding the jailer to keep them securely . . . the inner prison . . . fastened their feet in the stocks**).

i. In Jewish legal tradition, there was a maximum number of blows that could be delivered when beating a person, but the Romans had no such limit. We can rest assured Paul and Silas were severely beaten. Paul would later write of his ministry: *In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.*

(2Co_11:23)

ii. After such a bad beating, they were put in uncomfortable conditions (**fastened their feet in the stocks**).

“These stocks had more than two holes for legs, which could thus be forced apart in a such a way as to cause the utmost discomfort and cramping pain.” (Bruce)

iii. Even in their pain, God was not far from Paul and Silas. Tertullian said, “The legs feel nothing in the stocks when the heart is in heaven.”

5. (Act_16:25-32) The conversion of the Philippian jailer.

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are

all here.” Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

a. **But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God:** Though they have been arrested, beaten, and imprisoned for doing good, Paul and Silas are filled with joy, and sing praises to God. What will it take to make us stop praising God?

i. Anyone can be happy in pleasant circumstances, but real joy comes only from within, and is a gift available to Christians at all times.

ii. “Instead of cursing men, they blessed God.” (Stott)

b. **And the prisoners were listening to them:** What a strange sound it must have been to the other **prisoners!**

Prayers and praises unto God at midnight, in the midst of a brutal prison. Those prison walls had probably never heard such a sound!

c. **Suddenly there was a great earthquake:** This earthquake was clearly supernatural. This was not only because of its timing and location, but in the way that **all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.**

d. **The keeper of the prison . . . was about to kill himself:** The jailer’s reaction had good reason behind it. Guards who allowed their prisoners to escape had to bear the penalty of their escaped prisoners. Knowing this, **Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”** He assures the jailer that no one has escaped.

i. It would have been easy for Paul and Silas to escape thinking God had instigated another miraculous jailbreak.

But to them, the lives of others were more important than their own personal freedom and comfort.

ii. In not escaping, they showed tremendous discernment. The *circumstances* said, “escape.” But love said, “Stay for the sake of this one soul.” They were not guided merely by circumstances, but by what love compelled.

e. This hardened keeper of the prison **fell down trembling**. This is as dramatic as it sounds. This man was more affected by the love and grace in the lives of Paul and Silas than an earthquake. This may have even been the same guard who beat them a few hours earlier!

f. **Sirs, what must I do be saved?** The jailer was so impressed by Paul and Silas - by the love they showed to him, and from their ability to take joy even in misery - that he instantly wants the kind of life that Paul and Silas have.

i. This is how God wants our lives to be: Natural magnets drawing people to Him. Our Christianity should make others want what we have with God.

g. Paul’s answer to the keeper of the prison is a classic statement of the essence of the gospel: **believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved**. This is salvation by grace alone, received by faith alone.

i. Some have worried that Paul’s invitation to salvation here is *too* easy, and would promote an “easy-believism” and a “cheap grace.” Others refuse to preach repentance, claiming that this text says that it is not necessary.

ii. Paul never specifically called the keeper of the prison to repent because *he was already repenting*. We see the humble repentance of the jailer in that he **fell down trembling**, in the full idea of the word **believe** (*pistis*, which means to trust in, rely on, and cling to), and in the command to believe on the **Lord** Jesus Christ).

h. **You and your household** seems to be a specific promise for that Philippian jailer. Paul was, under inspiration by the Holy Spirit, telling the keeper of the prison that his household would trust Jesus just as he did.

i. This was a promise made specifically to the keeper of the prison. But it is a promise that the Holy Spirit may well make

alive to us, helping us to trust Him for the salvation of our families.

ii. However, the jailer's household was not saved merely because he was; Paul came **spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house**. They were all saved because they all trust the word of God and the Jesus revealed to us through the word.

6. (Act_16:33-34) The Philippian jailer ministers to Paul and Silas.

And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.

a. **And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes**: The same jailer who had been punishing them was now ministering to Paul and Silas, caring for their wounds and **he set food before them**. This shows how repentant he was and how he followed the example of love shown by Paul and Silas.

b. **And immediately he and all his family were baptized**: The jailer and his family saw no reason to delay baptism; they were baptized that very night, and all this began around midnight (Act_16:25).

c. **And he rejoiced**: This man was carried from suicidal fear to abounding joy in just a few minutes. All of it flowed from Paul and Silas' courageous praise to God in terrible adversity.

7. (Act_16:35-36) Paul and Silas return to the prison, and are set free by the magistrates the next day.

And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go." So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

a. Paul and Silas did leave the prison (in the protective custody of the jailer) to minister to the jailer's household.

But Paul and Silas returned to the prison willingly to spare the jailer certain death.

b. **Let those men go:** To arrest, beat, and imprison someone; then to quickly release them is common in societies that recognize few rights for their citizens. This sort of treatment effectively terrorizes the population into submission.

c. **The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace:** If Paul and Silas were released the day after their beating, arrest, and imprisonment, why did God send the earthquake? We see that the earthquake had absolutely *nothing* to do with freeing Paul and Silas from prison. But it had everything to do with the salvation of a certain prison guard and his household.

8. (Act_16:37-39) Paul and Silas reveal their Roman citizenship.

But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.” And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city.

a. **They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans:** Because Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they *had* recognized civil rights, which were grievously violated by the Philippian magistrates. Upon learning this, the magistrates are filled with fear, because it was a grave offense to treat Roman citizens as Paul and Silas had been treated.

b. Why didn’t Paul and Silas reveal their Roman citizenship earlier? It is possible that they didn’t have the opportunity, but it is more likely that the Holy Spirit was directing them to not reveal it until a certain time.

i. Our *rights* are not as important as our *obedience* to the will of God. God may ask us to lay down our rights for the good of another (in this case, for the good of the Philippian jailer).
ii. How could Paul and Silas have proved their Roman citizenship? "They may each have carried a copy of his *professio* or registration of birth, in which his Roman status would have been recorded. These were convenient in size . . . To claim Roman citizenship falsely was punishable by death." (Williams)

c. **They came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city:** The magistrates act like any politicians act by instinct. They try to make their problem go away quietly by sweeping them under the rug.

9. (Act_16:40) Paul and Silas leave Philippi on their own terms.

So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of* Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

a. They agree to go, but only after **they had seen the brethren and encouraged them**. Paul and Silas would not be hurried out of town until they had brought their work there to a conclusion.

b. In Philippi, Paul and Silas left behind two notable converts: Lydia and the prison guard. Each of these two had their lives touched by Jesus in very different ways.

i. Lydia was a churchgoer; the guard was not. Lydia was prospering in business; the guard was about to kill himself. Lydia's heart was gently opened; the guard's heart was violently confronted. The guard had a remarkable sign - an earthquake, but all Lydia had was the move of the Holy Spirit in her heart. Both heard the gospel and believed, and through each of them their whole families were touched!

c. The great missionary David Livingstone summarized the spirit of Paul when he said, "I am prepared to go anywhere, so long as it is forward." (Cited in Barclay)

(Act 16:2) The brothers in Lystra⁶ and Iconium⁷ spoke well⁸ of him.⁹

(Act 16:3) Paul wanted Timothy¹⁰ to accompany him, and he took¹¹ him and circumcised¹² him because of the Jews who were in those places,¹³ for they all knew that his father was Greek.¹⁴

(Act 16:4) As they went through the towns,¹⁵ they passed on¹⁶ the decrees that had been decided on by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem¹⁷ for the Gentile believers¹⁸ to obey.¹⁹

(Act 16:5) So the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number every day.²⁰

(Act 16:6) ***Paul's Vision of the Macedonian Man***

They went through the region of Phrygia²¹ and Galatia,²² having been prevented²³ by the Holy Spirit from speaking the message²⁴ in the province of Asia.²⁵

(Act 16:7) When they came to²⁶ Mysia,²⁷ they attempted to go into Bithynia,²⁸ but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow²⁹ them to do this,³⁰

(Act 16:8) so they passed through³¹ Mysia³² and went down to Troas.³³

(Act 16:9) A³⁴ vision appeared to Paul during the night: A Macedonian man was standing there³⁵ urging him,³⁶ "Come over³⁷ to Macedonia³⁸ and help us!"

(Act 16:10) After Paul³⁹ saw the vision, we attempted⁴⁰ immediately to go over to Macedonia,⁴¹ concluding that God had called⁴² us to proclaim the good news to them.

(Act 16:11) ***Arrival at Philippi***

We put out to sea⁴³ from Troas⁴⁴ and sailed a straight course⁴⁵ to Samothrace,⁴⁶ the next day to Neapolis,⁴⁷

(Act 16:12) and from there to Philippi,⁴⁸ which is a leading city of that district⁴⁹ of Macedonia,⁵⁰ a Roman colony.⁵¹ We stayed in this city for some days.

(Act 16:13) On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate to the side of the river, where we thought there would be a place of prayer, and we sat down⁵² and began to speak⁵³ to the women⁵⁴ who had assembled there.⁵⁵

(Act 16:14) A⁵⁶ woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth⁵⁷ from the city of Thyatira,⁵⁸ a God-fearing woman, listened to us.⁵⁹ The Lord opened her heart to respond⁶⁰ to what Paul was saying.

(Act 16:15) After she and her household were baptized, she urged us,⁶¹ "If⁶² you consider me to be a believer in the Lord,⁶³ come and stay in my house." And she persuaded⁶⁴ us.

(Act 16:16) ***Paul and Silas Are Thrown Into Prison***

Now⁶⁵ as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave girl met us who had a spirit that enabled her to foretell the future by supernatural means.⁶⁶ She⁶⁷ brought her owners⁶⁸ a great profit by fortune-telling.⁶⁹

(Act 16:17) She followed behind Paul and us and kept crying out,⁷⁰ "These men are servants⁷¹ of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way⁷² of salvation."⁷³

(Act 16:18) She continued to do this for many days. But Paul became greatly annoyed,⁷⁴ and turned⁷⁵ and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ⁷⁶ to come out of her!" And it came out of her at once.⁷⁷

(Act 16:19) But when her owners⁷⁸ saw their hope of profit⁷⁹ was gone, they seized⁸⁰ Paul and Silas and dragged⁸¹ them into the marketplace before the authorities.

(Act 16:20) When⁸² they had brought them⁸³ before the magistrates, they said, "These men are throwing our city into confusion.⁸⁴

They are⁸⁵ Jews

(Act 16:21) and are advocating⁸⁶ customs that are not lawful for us to accept⁸⁷ or practice,⁸⁸ since we are⁸⁹ Romans."

(Act 16:22) The crowd joined the attack⁹⁰ against them, and the magistrates tore the clothes⁹¹ off Paul and Silas⁹² and ordered them to be beaten with rods.⁹³

(Act 16:23) After they had beaten them severely,⁹⁴ they threw them into prison and commanded⁹⁵ the jailer to guard them securely.

(Act 16:24) Receiving such orders, he threw them in the inner cell⁹⁶ and fastened their feet in the stocks.⁹⁷

(Act 16:25) About midnight Paul and Silas were praying⁹⁸ and singing hymns to God,⁹⁹ and the rest of¹⁰⁰ the prisoners were listening to them.

(Act 16:26) Suddenly a great earthquake occurred, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. Immediately all the doors flew open, and the bonds¹⁰¹ of all the prisoners came loose.

(Act 16:27) When the jailer woke up¹⁰² and saw the doors of the prison standing open,¹⁰³ he drew his sword and was about to kill himself,¹⁰⁴ because he assumed¹⁰⁵ the prisoners had escaped.

(Act 16:28) But Paul called out loudly,¹⁰⁶ "Do not harm yourself,¹⁰⁷ for we are all here!"

(Act 16:29) Calling for lights, the jailer¹⁰⁸ rushed in and fell down¹⁰⁹ trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas.

(Act 16:30) Then he brought them outside¹¹⁰ and asked, "Sirs, what must¹¹¹ I do to be saved?"

(Act 16:31) They replied,¹¹² "Believe¹¹³ in the Lord Jesus¹¹⁴ and you will be saved, you and your household."

(Act 16:32) Then¹¹⁵ they spoke the word of the Lord¹¹⁶ to him, along with all those who were in his house.

(Act 16:33) At¹¹⁷ that hour of the night he took them¹¹⁸ and washed their wounds;¹¹⁹ then¹²⁰ he and all his family¹²¹ were baptized right away.¹²²

(Act 16:34) The jailer¹²³ brought them into his house and set food¹²⁴ before them, and he rejoiced greatly¹²⁵ that he had come to believe¹²⁶ in God, together with his entire household.¹²⁷

(Act 16:35) At daybreak¹²⁸ the magistrates¹²⁹ sent their police officers,¹³⁰ saying, "Release those men."

(Act 16:36) The jailer reported these words to Paul, saying,¹³¹ "The magistrates have sent orders¹³² to release you. So come out now and go in peace."¹³³

(Act 16:37) But Paul said to the police officers,¹³⁴ "They had us beaten in public¹³⁵ without a proper trial¹³⁶ — even though we are Roman citizens¹³⁷ — and they threw us¹³⁸ in prison. And now they want to send us away¹³⁹ secretly? Absolutely not! They¹⁴⁰

themselves must come and escort us out!"¹⁴¹

(Act 16:38) The police officers reported these words to the magistrates. They were frightened when they heard Paul and Silas¹⁴² were Roman citizens¹⁴³

(Act 16:39) and came¹⁴⁴ and apologized to them. After¹⁴⁵ they brought them out, they asked them repeatedly¹⁴⁶ to leave the city.

(Act 16:40) When they came out of the prison, they entered Lydia's house, and when they saw the brothers, they encouraged them and then¹⁴⁷ departed.

(Act 17:1) ***Paul and Silas at Thessalonica***

After they traveled through¹ Amphipolis² and Apollonia,³ they came to Thessalonica,⁴ where there was a Jewish synagogue.⁵

(Guzik)

Act 17:1-34

Acts 17 - PAUL IN THESSALONICA, BEREIA, AND ATHENS

A. God's work in Thessalonica.

1. (Act_17:1-4) Paul finds more ministry success in the city of Thessalonica.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from

the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

a. **As his custom was**, Paul first went to the synagogue, and preached Jesus crucified and risen again to the Jews (**explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead**). He also explained that Jesus was the Messiah (**“This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.”**)

b. In response, **some of them were persuaded**; most of them were **devout Greeks**, but also many prominent Jewish women (**not a few of the leading women**).

i. By all accounts, the work was a success, **a great multitude believed**. We can be sure that this work was bathed in prayer, and God was leading Paul to open, prepared hearts in his evangelistic work.

c. When Paul was in Thessalonica, he received financial support from the Christians in Philippi (Php_4:15-16). They helped with this successful work among the Thessalonians.

2. (Act_17:5-9) Envious Jews instigate a mob to riot against Paul and Silas.

But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king; Jesus.” And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.

a. **The Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar:** As happened in Pisidian Antioch (Act_13:45; Act_13:50), Iconium (Act_14:2; Act_14:5), and Lystra (Act_14:19) on the first missionary journey, here also Paul is opposed by a mob incited by **envious** people among the Jews.

b. **And attacked the house of Jason:** Jason was a Christian in Thessalonica whose house seems to have been a center for the church. When the **evil men from the marketplace** did not find Paul and Silas there, they attacked Jason himself, and **some brethren** who were with him.

c. **Crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.”** When accusing these Christians before **the rulers of the city**, the **evil men from the marketplace** gave an unintended compliment to the effectiveness of God’s work through Paul and Silas. To complain that the Christians were **these who have turned the world upside-down have come here too** was to say, “these men have radically impacted our world and nothing seems the same.” God willing and blessing, people would say such things about the effectiveness of Christians today!

i. Jesus did not come only to be our teacher, but to turn our world upside-down. The powerful and the eminent of this world are at the top of the power pyramid and look down on the weak and insignificant; but Jesus comes and turns that pyramid around and says, “If you want to come to Me, you have to come like a little child.” As Paul says, God has chosen the foolish and weak things of the world to confound the wise (1Co_1:27), and so God turns the world’s power-pyramid upside down.

ii. Jesus gave a great example of this upside-down thinking when He spoke of a rich man who amassed great

wealth, and all he could think about was building bigger barns to store all his wealth. We would make the man a civic leader or recognized him as a prominent man; Jesus turned it all upside down and called the man a fool, because he had done nothing to get his life right with God. (Luk_12:16-21)

iii. Actually, God was working through Paul and Silas to turn the world *right side-up* again. But when you yourself are upside-down, the other direction appears to be upside-down!

d. The **evil men from the marketplace** made an even more serious accusation: **“these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king; Jesus.”** This **troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things**, because this raised the fear that their city might become a hotbed of political rebellion against Caesar.

i. Their fears were unfounded. Even though the gospel has definite political implications, it makes Christians *better* citizens than before, and their prayers for officials of government are more helpful than most imagine.

ii. Even the unfounded accusation of political revolution had a compliment hidden inside. Even the **evil men from the marketplace** understood that Christians taught that Jesus was a **king**, that He had the right to rule over His people. Why is it that all too many churchgoers miss this message today?

iii. “It may be for this reason that Paul avoided the use of ‘kingdom’ and ‘king’ in his letters to his converts, lest Gentile imperial authorities misconstrue them to connote opposition to the empire and emperor.” (Longenecker) e. **When they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.** Jason and the others were released once they left a security deposit, to guarantee against any future riots.

i. Basically, the Roman magistrates did not care what you believed. But when the public order was disrupted by riots,

they came down with an iron hand. If things got out of hand, it wouldn't be long until the Emperor dispatched his legions to restore order, and no one wanted that. So Jason had to post the bond even though he did not instigate the riot.

B. God's work in Berea.

1. (Act_17:10-12) More evangelistic success in the city of Berea.

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.

a. **Then the brethren immediately set Paul and Silas away by night to Berea:** Paul and Silas flee Thessalonica quickly, not wanting to bring more persecution on the Christians there or to jeopardize Jason's security deposit.

i. After they had left suddenly after spending only a few weeks in Thessalonica (Act_17:2), Paul felt he had so much more to say to these Christians, so he wrote the letter of 1 Thessalonians. Many feel 1 Thessalonians was Paul's "first" letter.

b. **When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews:** In Berea, they follow their familiar strategy, and found that their audience was **more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica**. Two things earned this compliment for the Bereans: first, **they received the word with all readiness**. Second, they **searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so**.

i. The Bereans were taught by the most famous apostle and theologian of the early church, and the human author of at least 13 New Testament books. Yet, they **searched the Scriptures** when Paul taught, to see if his teaching was

truly Biblical! They would not accept Paul's word at face value, but wanted to *know* if **these things were so**.

When they heard Paul teach, their settled reaction wasn't "My, he's a fine speaker." It wasn't "I don't like the way he talks." It wasn't "What a funny preacher!" Instead, the Bereans wanted to know, "Are **these things . . . so**? Is this man teaching us the truth? Let's search the Scriptures **daily to find out whether these things** are so."

ii. Their research was not casual. They **searched** the Scriptures. It was worth it to them to work hard at it, and investigate what the Word of God said, and how Paul's teaching matched up with it. They also searched the Scriptures **daily** to find out. It wasn't a one time, quick look. They made it a point of diligent, extended study. Also, they searched the Scriptures daily **to find out**. They believed they could understand and **find out** truth from the Bible. For them, the Bible was not just a pretty book of poetry or mystery or nice spiritual inspiration for thoughts-for-the-day. It was a book of *truth*, and that truth was there **to find out**.

iii. But with all their diligent searching and concern for the truth, the Bereans did not become skeptics. They **received the word with all readiness**. When Paul preached, they had open hearts, but clear heads. Many people have clear heads, but closed hearts, and never receive **the word with all readiness**. It was *both* of these things that made the Bereans **more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica**.

iv. We should be **more fair-minded** than the Bereans. We should receive **the word with all readiness**, with open hearts. But we must also have clear heads, and when we hear a preacher, be those who search **the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things** [are] **so**. If the great apostle Paul was worthy of this kind of close examination, how much more should teachers and preachers today be carefully compared with the Scriptures!

c. **Therefore many of them believed:** Paul had nothing to fear by the diligent searching of the Scriptures by the Bereans. If they were really seeking God and His Word, they would find out that what Paul was preaching was true. This is exactly what happened among the Bereans, and **therefore many of them believed.**

2. (Act_17:13-15) Paul is forced to leave Berea.

But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.

So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.

a. The **Jews from Thessalonica** were not satisfied to force Paul out of their own city. They even followed Paul to Berea to disrupt his work there also.

b. These troublemakers **stirred up the crowds** against Paul, just as had been done before in Pisidian Antioch (Act_13:45; Act_13:50), Iconium (Act_14:2; Act_14:5), and Lystra (Act_14:19) on the first missionary journey, and in Thessalonica (Act_17:5-8) on the second missionary journey. This is now the fifth city Paul has been run out of by an angry mob, stirred up by envious Jewish leaders.

c. **Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away:** The Christians in Berea sent Paul away to Athens, fearing for his life and a total disruption of the work going on there. **But both Silas and Timothy remained there**, because Paul wanted to leave them behind to take care of new Christians in Berea.

i. Why didn't they all go? Because Paul had a passion for planting churches, not just making converts. If Paul could not stay in the city and strengthen the Christians there, he wanted his trusted associates to stay and do the job.

C. God's work in Athens.

1. (Act_17:16-17) Paul is provoked to preach in the city of Athens.

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.

a. **Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him:** The sense is that Paul would have preferred to wait until Timothy and Silas came from Berea before he began ministry in earnest in Athens. But **when he saw that the city was given over to idols**, he was compelled to preach the gospel immediately.

i. Paul had probably never been to Athens before, and like any tourist, he was ready to be very impressed by this incredibly famous and historical city. But when Paul toured the city, he was only depressed by the incredible idolatry he saw all around him.

ii. The idea behind **given over to idols** (*kateidolos*) is really *under* idols, or *swamped by idols*. So Paul saw the beauty of Athens, having the best that Greek sculptors and architects could offer. But all that beauty did not honor God, so it did not impress him at all.

b. **Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue . . . and in the marketplace daily:** Paul's practice was to preach wherever he could get an audience. Here it was both in the **synagogue** and in the **marketplace**.

c. Paul faced a challenging audience in Athens. It was a cultured, educated city that was proud of its history. It was an intellectual center, much like Oxford or Cambridge in England. Paul spoke to a city perhaps different than any other city he had preached in.

i. "Although Athens had long since lost the political eminence which was hers in an earlier day, she continued to

represent the highest level of culture attained in classical antiquity.” (Bruce)

ii. “By now the greatest days of Athens were behind it, but it could still be fairly described as the intellectual capital of the Greco-Roman world and, at the same time, the religious capital of Greece.” (Williams)

2. (Act_17:18-21) The novelty his message earns Paul an invitation to preach at the intellectual center of the city, the *Areopagus*.

Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this babbler want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,” because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new doctrine *is* of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean.” For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

a. **Then certain Epicurean . . . philosophers encountered him:** The *Epicureans* pursued pleasure as the chief purpose in life, and valued most of all the pleasure of a peaceful life, free from pain, disturbing passions and superstitious fears (including the fear of death). They did not deny the existence of gods, but believed that they had nothing to do with man.

b. **Then certain . . . Stoic philosophers encountered him:** The *Stoics* were pantheists who put great emphasis on moral sincerity and a high sense of duty. They cultivated a spirit of proud dignity, and believed that suicide was better than a life lived with less dignity.

i. The Stoics believed that everything was god, and god was in everything. So they believed that all things, good or evil, were from god and so nothing should be resisted, and they

believed there was no particular direction or destiny for mankind.

c. **And some said:** Some derided Paul because he did not communicate with the philosophical niceties popular in Athens (**What does this babbler want to say?**). Others thought Paul was an exotic **proclaimer of foreign gods**.

d. However, the essence of Paul's message did not change in Athens. They all understood that **he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection**.

e. **For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or hear some strange new thing.** It was the *novelty* of Paul's message that earned him the invitation to the **Areopagus**. These ancient Greeks lusted after the latest, just like we today.

i. In the early nineteenth century, Adam Clarke described the situation of his day, and it sounds like it is even more true of our own time. "This is a striking feature of the city of London in the present day. The itch for news, which generally argues a worldly, shallow, or unsettled mind, is wonderfully prevalent: even ministers of the Gospel, negligent of their sacred function, are become in this sense Athenians; so that the book of God is neither read nor studied with half the avidity and spirit as a *newspaper* . . . It is no wonder if such become political preachers, and their sermons be no better than husks for swine. To such *the hungry sheep look up, and are not fed.* "

3. (Act_17:22-31) Paul's sermon on Mars' Hill (the **Areopagus**).

Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN

GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world

and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

a. **Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious:** Paul does not begin with an exposition of Scripture, which was his custom when dealing with Jews or Gentiles who would be familiar with the Old Testament.

Instead, Paul begins with general references to religion.

b. **In all things you are very religious:** The religious character of Athens was noticed by many ancient observers, some of whom thought that Athenians were the most religious of all human beings. But when Paul says this of the Athenians, he doesn't necessarily mean it in a positive way. Religion can lead a man away from God, and if we trust in a false religion, it is little credit to say of us that we are "religious."

c. **I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD:** Paul understood that in their extensive pantheon, the Greeks had an **unknown god**, who covered

any god that may have been neglected. Paul will now reveal to them the identity of the **Unknown God**.

i. Athens was filled with statues dedicated **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. Six hundred years before Paul, a terrible plague came on the city and a man name Epimenides had an idea. He let loose a flock of sheep through the town and wherever they lay down, they would sacrifice that sheep to the god that had the nearest shrine or temple. If a sheep lay down near no shrine or temple, they would sacrifice the sheep **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**.

d. **God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth**: Paul proclaims to them the God who created everything, yet He is distinct from His creation. Paul proclaimed that God was bigger than any temple men's hands could build (**does not dwell in temples made with hands**), and could not be represented by anything men could make with their hands (**Nor is He worshipped with men's hands**).

i. In bringing an understanding of who God is to these people, Paul started at the beginning: God is the Creator, and we are His creatures. "This view of the world is very different from either the Epicurean emphasis on a chance combination of atoms or the virtual pantheism of the Stoics." (Stott)

ii. Paul recognized that these philosophers had to change their ideas about God. They had to move from their own personal opinions to an understanding who God is according to what He tells us about Himself in the Bible

e. **And He has made from one blood every nation of men**: Paul proclaimed that we are all descended from Adam through Noah, and that there is one God who created us all and we are all obligated to. Since God created us all, we **should seek the Lord . . . though He is not far from each one of us**.

f. **For in Him we live and move and have our being . . . For we are also His offspring**: These two quotations

Paul uses from Greek poets are attributed to Epimenides the Cretan [600 BC] (who Paul quotes again in Tit_1:12) and Aratus [310 BC].

i. Paul did not quote these men because they were prophets or because all their teaching was of God. He quoted them because these specific words reflected a Biblical truth, and by using them he could build a bridge to his pagan audience.

g. **Therefore since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone:** Paul proclaimed our responsibility to God because we are His **offspring**. Since we are His **offspring**, we are responsible to have right ideas about God, and therefore must reject the wrong idea that **gold or silver or stone** could represent God.

i. “The Athenians have acknowledged in their altar inscription that they are ignorant of God, and Paul has been giving evidence of their ignorance. Now he declares such ignorance to be culpable.” (Stott)

h. **Now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness:** Paul progresses from knowing who God is (our Creator), to who we are (His offspring), to our responsibility before Him (to understand Him and worship Him in truth), to our accountability if we dishonor Him (judgment).

i. Paul wasn't preaching a “soft” gospel. He boldly confronted the wrong ideas the Athenians had about God, and confronted them with the reality of coming judgment.

i. **He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man who He has ordained:** Now, for the first time, Paul refers to Jesus. His first mention of Jesus considers Jesus as a righteous judge!

i. Certainly, Paul did not want to leave the Athenians with the idea that Jesus was only a righteous judge. However, he will be stopped short before he can tell them everything he

wants to about Jesus. Probably, all that Paul said before was introduction; now he gets to what he wanted to speak about: The person and work of Jesus.

j. **He has given assurance of this by raising Him from the dead:** The emphasis on the resurrection is important.

Paul sees the resurrection of Jesus as the **assurance of this**; it demonstrates that the person, teaching, and work of Jesus were all perfectly approved by the Father.

i. Paul seemed unable to preach a sermon without bringing in the resurrection of Jesus. For him, none of the Christian life made sense without the triumph of Jesus' resurrection.

4. (Act_17:32-34) The reaction of the listeners at Areopagus. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this *matter*." So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

a. **When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked:** The resurrection was not a popular concept among Greek philosophers. Some thought Paul foolish for even believing such a thing, and others wanted to hear more about this new teaching (**others said, "We will hear you again on this matter"**).

i. The Greeks were fond of the idea of the immortality of the soul, but not of the idea of the resurrection of the body.

They felt that anything material was inherently evil, so there really could be no such thing as a "glorified" body.

They thought the ultimate form of glory would be "pure spirit."

b. **So Paul departed among them:** Paul wanted to talk about Jesus. He could have, if he wanted to, stayed there and discussed Greek philosophy all day long. But Paul was not interested. If he couldn't talk about Jesus, he didn't have much to say.

i. Without doubt, Paul was really just beginning his sermon. Far more than wanting to quote Greek poets, he wanted to

tell them about Jesus. But as soon as he mentioned the resurrection, he stopped him short. Certainly, Paul discussed more with people one-on-one. But he was prevented from saying all he wanted to in his speech at the Areopagus.

c. **However, some men joined him and believed:** The results at the Areopagus seemed small, yet some did believe. Among those believing were a man named **Dionysius** (who must have been a member of the “court” of the Areopagus) and a woman named **Damaris**.

5. Assessing Paul’s sermon on the Areopagus.

a. Some have criticized this sermon because there is no detailed reference to the cross or specific quotes from the Old Testament. Some think Paul compromised his message for an intellectual audience, and therefore there were few conversions.

i. The idea continues that when Paul went next to Corinth, he decided to preach the cross and the cross only, even if it seemed foolish (1Co_1:18-25). Because Paul preached this way in Corinth, he saw much better results.

ii. Ramsay popularized the theory that Paul was disappointed by his “meager” results in Athens, and went on to Corinth preaching the gospel with a pure focus on the cross, and without any attempt at philosophical explanation.

b. But Paul’s sermon here *is* eminently Biblical. “Like the biblical revelation itself, his argument begins with God the creator of all and ends with God the judge of all . . . The speech as it stands admirably summarizes an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans.” (Bruce)

c. As well, Paul *did* preach Christ crucified in Athens. In Act_17:30-31 he specifically mentions the resurrection, and how could he preach the resurrection without preaching the cross which came before it? This is obviously a short extract of Paul’s speech on the Areopagus; what is recorded takes barely two minutes to say.

i. "We learn from Paul that we cannot preach the gospel of Jesus without the doctrine of God, or the cross without the creation, or salvation without judgment." (Stott)

d. In addition, it is dangerous to judge the content of the message by the magnitude of the response.

i. "The reason the gospel did not take root there probably lay more in the attitude of the Athenians themselves than in Paul's approach or in what he said." (Longenecker)

(Act 17:2) Paul went to the Jews in the synagogue,⁶ as he customarily did, and on three Sabbath days he addressed⁷ them from the scriptures, (Act 17:3) explaining and demonstrating⁸ that the Christ⁹ had to suffer and to rise from the dead,¹⁰ saying,¹¹ "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."¹²

(Act 17:4) Some of them were persuaded¹³ and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large group¹⁴ of God-fearing Greeks¹⁵ and quite a few¹⁶ prominent women.

(Act 17:5) But the Jews became jealous,¹⁷ and gathering together some worthless men from the rabble in the marketplace,¹⁸ they formed a mob¹⁹ and set the city in an uproar.²⁰ They attacked Jason's house,²¹ trying to find Paul and Silas²² to bring them out to the assembly.²³

(Act 17:6) When they did not find them, they dragged²⁴ Jason and some of the brothers before the city officials,²⁵ screaming, "These people who have stirred up trouble²⁶ throughout the world²⁷ have come here too, (Act 17:7) and²⁸ Jason has welcomed them as guests! They²⁹ are all acting against Caesar's³⁰ decrees, saying there is another king named³¹ Jesus!"³²

(Act 17:8) They caused confusion among³³ the crowd and the city officials³⁴ who heard these things.

(Act 17:9) After³⁵ the city officials³⁶ had received bail³⁷ from Jason and the others, they released them.

(Act 17:10) ***Paul and Silas at Berea***

The brothers sent Paul and Silas off to Berea³⁸ at once, during the night. When they arrived,³⁹ they went to the Jewish synagogue.⁴⁰

(Act 17:11) These Jews⁴¹ were more open-minded⁴² than those in Thessalonica,⁴³ for they eagerly⁴⁴ received⁴⁵ the message, examining⁴⁶ the scriptures carefully every day⁴⁷ to see if these things were so.

(Act 17:12) Therefore many of them believed, along with quite a few⁴⁸ prominent⁴⁹ Greek women and men.

(Act 17:13) But when the Jews from Thessalonica⁵⁰ heard that Paul had also proclaimed the word of God⁵¹ in Berea,⁵² they came there too, inciting⁵³ and disturbing⁵⁴ the crowds.

(Act 17:14) Then the brothers sent Paul away to the coast⁵⁵ at once, but Silas and Timothy remained in Berea.⁵⁶

(Act 17:15) Those who accompanied Paul escorted him as far as Athens,⁵⁷ and after receiving an order for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.⁵⁸

(Act 17:16) ***Paul at Athens***

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens,⁵⁹ his spirit was greatly upset⁶⁰ because he saw⁶¹ the city was full of idols.

(Act 17:17) So he was addressing⁶² the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles⁶³ in the synagogue,⁶⁴ and in the marketplace every day⁶⁵

those who happened to be there.

(Act 17:18) Also some of the Epicurean⁶⁶ and Stoic⁶⁷ philosophers were conversing⁶⁸ with him, and some were asking,⁶⁹ "What does this foolish babbler⁷⁰ want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods."⁷¹ (They said this because he was proclaiming the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.)⁷²

(Act 17:19) So they took Paul and⁷³ brought him to the Areopagus,⁷⁴ saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are proclaiming?"

(Act 17:20) For you are bringing some surprising things⁷⁵ to our ears, so we want to know what they⁷⁶ mean."

(Act 17:21) (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there used to spend their time⁷⁷ in nothing else than telling⁷⁸ or listening to something new.)⁷⁹

(Act 17:22) So Paul stood⁸⁰ before the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious⁸¹ in all respects.⁸²

(Act 17:23) For as I went around and observed closely your objects of worship,⁸³ I even found an altar with this inscription:⁸⁴ 'To an unknown god.' Therefore what you worship without knowing it,⁸⁵ this I proclaim to you.

(Act 17:24) The God who made the world and everything in it,⁸⁶ who is⁸⁷ Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by human hands,⁸⁸

(Act 17:25) nor is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything,⁸⁹ because he himself gives life and breath and everything to everyone.⁹⁰

(Act 17:26) From one man⁹¹ he made every nation of the human race⁹² to inhabit the entire earth,⁹³ determining their set times⁹⁴ and the fixed limits of the places where they would live,⁹⁵

(Act 17:27) so that they would search for God and perhaps grope around⁹⁶ for him and find him,⁹⁷ though he is⁹⁸ not far from each one of us.

(Act 17:28) For in him we live and move about⁹⁹ and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'¹⁰⁰

(Act 17:29) So since we are God's offspring, we should not think the deity¹⁰¹ is like gold or silver or stone, an image¹⁰² made by human¹⁰³ skill¹⁰⁴ and imagination.¹⁰⁵

(Act 17:30) Therefore, although God has overlooked¹⁰⁶ such times of ignorance,¹⁰⁷ he now commands all people¹⁰⁸ everywhere to repent,¹⁰⁹

(Act 17:31) because he has set¹¹⁰ a day on which he is going to judge the world¹¹¹ in righteousness, by a man

whom he designated,¹¹²

having provided proof to everyone by raising¹¹³ him from the dead."

(Act 17:32) Now when they heard about¹¹⁴ the resurrection from the dead, some began to scoff,¹¹⁵ but others said, "We will hear you again about this."

(Act 17:33) So Paul left the Areopagus.¹¹⁶

(Act 17:34) But some people¹¹⁷ joined him¹¹⁸ and believed. Among them¹¹⁹ were Dionysius, who was a member of the Areopagus,¹²⁰ a woman¹²¹ named Damaris, and others with them.

(Act 18:1) ***Paul at Corinth***

After this¹ Paul² departed from³ Athens⁴ and went to Corinth.⁵

(Guzik)

Act 18:1-28

Acts 18 - PAUL IN CORINTH; THE END OF THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY AND BEGINNING OF THE THIRD

A. Paul in the city of Corinth.

1. (Act_18:1-3) Paul arrives in Corinth and meets Aquila and Priscilla.

After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.

a. **Corinth** was a major city of the Roman Empire, at an important crossroads of trade and travel; it was also a city notorious for its hedonism and immorality.

i. Even in Paul's day, **Corinth** was an ancient city. It was a commercial center with two harbors and a long rival to its northern neighbor, Athens. Corinth was a city with a remarkable reputation for loose living and especially sexual

immorality. In classical Greek, to *act like a Corinthian* was to practice fornication, and a *Corinthian companion* was a prostitute. This sexual immorality was permitted under the extremely prevalent worship of Aphrodite (also known as Venus, the goddess of fertility and sexuality). In 146 BC, Corinth rebelled against Rome and was brutally destroyed by Roman armies. It lay in ruins for a century, until Julius Caesar rebuilt the city, and it quickly re-established its former position as a center for both trade and immorality of every sort.

ii. “It is significant that it was from this city that Paul wrote his Roman letter; and when one reads his description of Gentile corruption in that Roman letter, one has almost certainly a mirror of what he found in Corinth.

(Rom_1:22-32)” (Morgan)

iii. One ancient writer described Corinth as a town where “none but the tough could survive.”

iv. Paul knew that because people from all over the Empire passed through Corinth, a strong church there could touch lives all over the Empire. He knew Corinth was a tough city, but he wasn’t only interested in planting churches where he thought it would be *easy*!

b. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila . . . with his wife Priscilla . . . and he came to them: It is implied, though not clearly stated, that Aquila and Priscilla were at this time Christians. But it is possible that Paul led them both to Jesus as they worked together as **tentmakers** (those who worked with leather).

i. **For by occupation they were tentmakers:** Paul’s tentmaking was an important part of his ministry. Though he recognized his right to be supported by those he ministered to (1Co_9:7-14), he voluntarily supported himself on the mission field so that no one could accuse him of seeking converts for the sake of enriching himself (1Co_9:15-18).

ii. In the modern missions movement, people call any work that a missionary does to support himself on the mission

field *tentmaking*.

iii. "In Judaism it was not considered proper for a scribe or a rabbi to receive payment for his teaching, so many of them practised a trade in addition to their study and teaching of the law." (Bruce)

c. **Because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome:** The Roman historian Suetonius writes that Claudius banished Jews from Rome because they were "indulging in constant riots at the instigation of Chrestus."

There have been many attempts to explain who *Chrestus* was, but a likely solution is that Suetonius referred to Christ, but writing some seventy years after the events, had the name somewhat mixed up. It seems that the expulsion had to do with "dissension and disorder within the Jewish community of Rome resulting from the introduction of Christianity into one or more of the synagogues of the city." (Bruce)

i. Chronology is often a tricky issue, but it seems that this expulsion of Jews from Rome occurred at about 49 AD.

2. (Act_18:4-8) Paul's ministry among the Jews and Gentiles of Corinth.

And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that* Jesus *is* the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, "Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus, *one* who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

a. **And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath:** Paul was effective as he **reasoned** among the Jews and

Greeks. The **Greeks** present in the synagogue were Gentiles interested in and sympathetic with Judaism.

b. **When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia:** When Timothy came, he brought news about how the Christians in Thessalonica were remaining steadfast in the faith (1Th_3:6-10). This brought Paul great joy, spurring him on in ministry (**Paul was compelled by the Spirit**). He answered back by writing 1 Thessalonians from Corinth.

i. Paul describes the character of his bold preaching in Corinth preaching in 1Co_2:1-16, where he declared, *For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

c. According to 2Co_11:8-9, while Paul was in Corinth, financial support arrived from the Christians in Philippi, and he was able to put aside tentmaking for a while and concentrate more fully on the task of building the church in Corinth.

d. **But when they opposed him and blasphemed:** The blasphemy must have been directed against Jesus, because Paul was preaching Jesus as the Messiah (**testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ**). This is an indirect declaration of the deity of Jesus, because someone can only really blaspheme God.

e. **From now on I will go to the Gentiles:** Paul strongly sensed his responsibility to preach to the Jews first (Rom_1:16), but when his message was rejected, he did not waste time in going to the Gentiles.

i. Paul fulfilled the spirit of what Jesus said in Mat_7:6 : *Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.* When people are determined to reject the gospel, we shouldn't keep trying with them until the door is open again.

f. Paul **shook his garments** so that not a speck of dust from the synagogue would remain on his clothes, much less

his sandals. This was a dramatic way of expressing his rejection of their rejection! Paul was certainly capable of dramatic and vivid demonstrations of his message.

g. However, Paul did not then *forbid* Jews to come to Jesus, because **Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household**. Paul merely switched the focus of his evangelism from the Jews to the Gentiles.

i. **Crispus** was one of the few in Corinth whom Paul personally baptized (1Co_1:14).

h. What kind of people were the **many of the Corinthians** who **believed and were baptized**? Paul tells us in 1Co_1:26 : *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.*

3. (Act_18:9-11) God's special encouragement to Paul in Corinth.

Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

a. **Do not be afraid**: The implication behind this message was that Paul *was* afraid, fearing that here in Corinth his work would be cut short by either opposing Jews (as in Thessalonica and Berea) or by the incredible worldliness around him.

i. Jesus didn't tell Paul that his opponents wouldn't *try* to stop him, only that they would not be successful.

b. The solution to Paul's fear is for him to *obey* Jesus' command to not be afraid; and to **speak and not keep silent**, that is, to keep getting the Word of God out.

c. The *basis* for God's command to not be afraid and to keep preaching is the promise **I am with you**. When we understand what this means, and Who is saying it, this is enough.

d. The additional promise **I have many people in this city** was a constant assurance to Paul, who must have often had doubts about the survival and health of the Corinthian church.

e. **And he continued there a year and six months:** Paul was in Corinth a year and a half, which seems to be longer than in any other city where he founded a church. His ministry at Corinth is described simply: **teaching the word of God among them.**

i. The duration of Paul's stay in Corinth shows where his heart was in ministry. He was no "in and out" evangelist, but a man committed to making disciples.

4. (Act_18:12-17) The Jews of Corinth attempt (unsuccessfully) to convict Paul before the civil authorities.

When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, "This *fellow* persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." And when Paul was about to open *his* mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look *to it* yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such *matters*." And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

a. In approaching the **proconsul of Achaia**, the Jews of Corinth are trying to stop Paul not only in Corinth, but also in the entire province.

i. "If Gallio had accepted the Jewish charge and found Paul guilty of the alleged offense, provincial governors everywhere would have had a precedent, and Paul's ministry would have been severely restricted. As it was, Gallio's refusal to act in the matter was tantamount to the recognition of Christianity as a *religio licita*"

(Longenecker)

b. **Gallio** was correct in seeing that the government has no legitimate role in attempting to decide religious matters, though government does have a legitimate role in matters of **wrongdoing or wicked crimes**.

c. Gallio looked the other way when angry Gentiles (probably more anti-Jewish than truly sympathetic to Paul) beat **Sosthenes**, the leader of the synagogue.

i. Apparently, when *Crispus* trusted in Jesus, he was replaced as *ruler of the synagogue* (verse 8) by Sosthenes - who later himself seems to have become a Christian (1Co_1:1).

B. The end of Paul's second missionary journey.

1. (Act_18:18) Paul leaves the city of Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla.

So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila *were* with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.

a. **He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow:** The **vow** was undoubtedly the vow of a Nazirite (Numbers 6). Usually, the vow of a Nazirite was taken for a certain period of time, and when completed, the hair (which had been allowed to freely grow) was cut off and offered to the Lord at a special ceremony at the temple in Jerusalem.

i. The purpose of the vow of a Nazirite was to express a unique consecration to God, promising to abstain from all products from the grapevine, to not cut one's hair, and to never come near a dead body.

ii. Why did Paul do this at this time? William Barclay suggests, "No doubt Paul was thinking of all God's goodness to him in Corinth and took this vow to show his gratitude." But the purpose of a Nazirite vow seems to be more of *consecration* than *thanksgiving*. Perhaps the intense

worldliness of Corinth made Paul want to express his dedication and separation unto the Lord more than ever.

b. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed:

Paul's intention is to travel to Jerusalem to offer this hair in a prescribed ceremony for those who had completed the vow of a Nazirite.

c. Apparently, though Paul was adamant that Jewish ceremonies and rituals must not be required of Gentiles, he saw nothing wrong with Jewish believers who wished to observe such ceremonies, presumably if their fulfillment in Jesus was also recognized.

i. By tradition, a Nazirite vow could only be fulfilled in Judea. Paul began this vow **at Cenchrea**, not in Judea.

Paul's adoption of the vow out of the bounds dictated by Jewish tradition could indicate a desire to practice a more purely Biblical observance of Jewish rituals.

2. (Act_18:19-21) Paul in the city of Ephesus.

And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked *him* to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus.

a. And he came to Ephesus: Paul wanted to preach in Ephesus some two years earlier, but was prevented by the Holy Spirit (Act_16:6). Now, the Holy Spirit gives him the liberty to minister in this important city, and great results are seen.

i. God has a special timing for everything in our lives. If Paul could have discerned it, the Holy Spirit was really saying, "wait" when he wanted to go to Ephesus, instead of "no." Sometimes God says, "wait" and He always knows what He's doing when He says it!

b. They asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in

Jerusalem” : Paul cannot stay long in Ephesus, wanting to present the offering of his Nazirite vow in Jerusalem at an upcoming feast.

3. (Act_18:22) Landing at Caesarea, and going through Jerusalem, Paul returns to his home church at Antioch of Syria, concluding his second missionary journey.

And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.

a. **Gone up and greeted the church**: When it says that Paul had **gone up and greeted the church**, it means he went **up** to Jerusalem and fulfilled his Nazirite vow in the temple.

C. Paul’s third missionary journey begins in the regions of Galatia, Phrygia, and the city of Ephesus.

1. (Act_18:23) In the regions of Galatia and Phrygia.

After he had spent some time *there*, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

a. **Strengthening all the disciples**: Paul’s passion for building disciples, not merely making converts, is evident again.

b. **Strengthening all the disciples** was important to Paul. If he were right here among us, he would want to know: “How strong of a disciple are you? What can I do to strengthen your walk with the Lord?” He would remind us all that it isn’t enough to make a strong beginning with Jesus, but we must be always getting stronger.

2. (Act_18:24-28) The ministry of Apollos in Ephesus.

Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more

accurately. And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

a. **Aquila and Priscilla:** Apparently, when Paul came to Ephesus on his second missionary journey (Act_18:19-21), he left Aquila and Priscilla, who had been traveling with him (Act_18:18), there in Ephesus.

b. In Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla met **a certain Jew named Apollos**. He is described as **an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures**, and **fervent in spirit**. The phrase **fervent in spirit** means literally “to boil in the spirit,”

and has the effect of “bubbling over with enthusiasm.” Apollos didn’t know much about Jesus (**though he knew only the baptism of John**), but what he knew he was excited about!

c. Apollos was a man who ministered mightily, yet with limited knowledge. So he was helped by Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, when they **took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately**.

i. Because Apollos knew of the work of John the Baptist, it is likely that he preached that the Messiah had come and we must respond to him, but he probably had little knowledge of the *full* person and work of Jesus Christ.

ii. The work of Aquila and Priscilla is an important area of ministry: Helping those who have a passion for God, and power in serving Him; yet they have limited knowledge or limited resources for truly effective ministry.

d. It seems Apollos (like many in his day) was a missionary called by God alone, because we have no indication that he was sent or commissioned by any specific apostle. He simply **came to Ephesus**.

e. **The brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him:** With letters of reference from the church in

Ephesus, Apollos ministered effectively in Achaia, especially among opposing Jews (**he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly**).

i. When Apollos went to the region of **Achaia**, it probably means he went to the city of Corinth in the region of Achaia. From what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, he apparently had a remarkable ministry there.

ii. Though some Corinthians fixated on Apollos in a divisive spirit (1Co_1:12; 1Co_3:4), there is no reason to believe that Apollos himself encouraged this. Paul himself regards Apollos as a trusted colleague (1Co_3:5-7; 1Co_16:12).

iii. Because Apollos was Jewish, and is described as **eloquent, fervent in spirit**, as one who **vigorously refuted the Jews**, able to demonstrate **from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ**, some scholars consider him the type of person who could have authored the letter to the Hebrews.

(Act 18:2) There he⁶ found⁷ a Jew named Aquila,⁸ a native of Pontus,⁹ who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius¹⁰ had ordered all the Jews to depart from¹¹ Rome.¹² Paul approached¹³ them, (Act 18:3) and because he worked at the same trade, he stayed with them and worked with them¹⁴ (for they were tentmakers¹⁵ by trade).¹⁶

(Act 18:4) He addressed¹⁷ both Jews and Greeks in the synagogue¹⁸ every Sabbath, attempting to persuade¹⁹ them.

(Act 18:5) Now when Silas and Timothy arrived²⁰ from Macedonia,²¹ Paul became wholly absorbed with proclaiming²² the word, testifying²³ to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.²⁴

(Act 18:6) When they opposed him²⁵ and reviled him,²⁶ he protested by shaking out his clothes²⁷ and said to them, "Your blood²⁸ be on your own heads! I am guiltless!²⁹ From now on I will go to the Gentiles!"

(Act 18:7) Then Paul³⁰ left³¹ the synagogue³² and went to the house of a person named Titius Justus, a Gentile who worshiped God,³³

whose house was next door to the synagogue.

(Act 18:8) Crispus, the president of the synagogue,³⁴ believed in the Lord together with his entire household, and many of the Corinthians who heard about it³⁵ believed and were baptized.

(Act 18:9) The Lord said to Paul by a vision³⁶ in the night,³⁷ "Do not be afraid,³⁸ but speak and do not be silent, (Act 18:10) because I am with you, and no one will assault³⁹ you to harm⁴⁰ you, because I have many people in this city."

(Act 18:11) So he stayed there⁴¹ a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.⁴²

(Act 18:12) ***Paul Before the Proconsul Gallio***

Now while Gallio⁴³ was proconsul⁴⁴ of Achaia,⁴⁵ the Jews attacked Paul together⁴⁶ and brought him before the judgment seat,⁴⁷

(Act 18:13) saying, "This man is persuading⁴⁸ people to worship God in a way contrary to⁴⁹ the law!"

(Act 18:14) But just as Paul was about to speak,⁵⁰ Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of some crime or serious piece of villainy,⁵¹

I would have been justified in accepting the complaint⁵² of you Jews,⁵³

(Act 18:15) but since it concerns points of disagreement⁵⁴ about words and names and your own law, settle⁵⁵ it yourselves. I will not be⁵⁶ a judge of these things!"

(Act 18:16) Then he had them forced away⁵⁷ from the judgment seat.⁵⁸

(Act 18:17) So they all seized Sosthenes, the president of the synagogue,⁵⁹ and began to beat⁶⁰ him in front of the judgment seat.⁶¹ Yet none of these things were of any concern⁶² to Gallio.

(Act 18:18) ***Paul Returns to Antioch in Syria***

Paul, after staying⁶³ many more days in Corinth,⁶⁴ said farewell to⁶⁵ the brothers and sailed away to Syria accompanied by⁶⁶

Priscilla and Aquila.⁶⁷ He⁶⁸ had his hair cut off⁶⁹ at Cenchrea⁷⁰ because he had made a vow.⁷¹

(Act 18:19) When they reached Ephesus,⁷² Paul⁷³ left Priscilla and Aquila⁷⁴ behind there, but he himself went⁷⁵ into the synagogue⁷⁶

and addressed⁷⁷ the Jews.

(Act 18:20) When they asked him to stay longer, he would not consent,⁷⁸

(Act 18:21) but said farewell to⁷⁹ them and added,⁸⁰ "I will come back⁸¹ to you again if God wills."⁸² Then⁸³ he set sail from Ephesus, (Act 18:22) and when he arrived⁸⁴ at Caesarea,⁸⁵ he went up and greeted⁸⁶ the church at Jerusalem⁸⁷ and then went down to Antioch.⁸⁸

(Act 18:23) After he spent⁸⁹ some time there, Paul left and went through the region of Galatia⁹⁰ and Phrygia,⁹¹ strengthening all the disciples.

(Act 18:24) ***Apollos Begins His Ministry***

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, arrived in Ephesus.⁹² He was an eloquent speaker,⁹³ well-versed⁹⁴ in the scriptures.

(Act 18:25) He had been instructed in⁹⁵ the way of the Lord, and with great enthusiasm⁹⁶ he spoke and taught accurately the facts⁹⁷

about Jesus, although he knew⁹⁸ only the baptism of John.

(Act 18:26) He began to speak out fearlessly⁹⁹ in the synagogue,¹⁰⁰ but when Priscilla and Aquila¹⁰¹ heard him, they took him aside¹⁰²

and explained the way of God to him more accurately.

(Act 18:27) When Apollos¹⁰³ wanted to cross over to Achaia,¹⁰⁴ the brothers encouraged¹⁰⁵ him¹⁰⁶ and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he¹⁰⁷

assisted greatly those who had believed by grace, (Act 18:28) for he refuted the Jews vigorously¹⁰⁸ in public debate,¹⁰⁹ demonstrating from the scriptures that the Christ¹¹⁰ was Jesus.¹¹¹

(Act 19:1) ***Disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus***

While¹ Apollos was in Corinth,² Paul went through the inland³ regions⁴ and came to Ephesus.⁵ He⁶ found some disciples there⁷

(Guzik)

Act 19:1-41

Acts 19 - PAUL IN EPHESUS

A. Ephesian disciples are baptized in the Holy Spirit.

1. (Act_19:1-2) In Ephesus, Paul finds some disciples who had not yet received the Holy Spirit.

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”

a. **Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?**

Apparently, there was something about these **disciples** that prompted the question from Paul; we don’t have any indication that it was his custom to ask people if they had received the Holy Spirit.

b. **We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit:** By their reply, these Ephesian **disciples** reveal that they have very little knowledge of God’s nature as revealed in Jesus. They know enough to be saved and students of Jesus (they are called **disciples**), but they didn’t know much about all Jesus has done for us.

2. (Act_19:3-4) Paul distinguishes between the baptism of John and baptism in the name of the Jesus.

And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.” Then Paul said, “John

indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”

a. **Into John’s baptism:** These Ephesian disciples had only a basic understanding of the Messiah Jesus and His ministry, only what could be gained through the message of John the Baptist. They were in the same place as Apollos before Aquila and Priscilla explained *the way of God more accurately* (Act_18:24-26).

i. They could have received **John’s baptism** from the hands of John himself; or perhaps some of John’s disciples continued on in his ministry after John’s death.

b. **John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance:** Paul points out that John’s baptism was one of **repentance**, not necessarily faith unto salvation. John’s message pointed to Jesus, but did not take men there itself.

c. One can imagine that these Ephesian disciples heard about the coming of the Messiah through John’s message, and they heard of their need to be ready to receive the Messiah and to ready themselves through repentance. Yet they actually do not seem to have heard that the Messiah *had* in fact come, and had not heard of their need to trust in His specific person and work.

d. Some have suggested that these Ephesian disciples were not actually Christians yet. The problem in this is that they are called *disciples*, which almost always refers to Christians, genuine followers of Jesus Christ. However, it must be said that the word *disciple* does have a broader understanding and application than its most frequent usage - describing a follower of Jesus.

i. However, Bruce makes the point: “When the men are called *disciples* without further qualification, that . . . seems to mean that they were disciples of Jesus. Had Luke meant to indicate that they were disciples of John the Baptist .

. . he would have said so explicitly.”

3. (Act_19:5-7) The twelve Ephesian disciples believe on Jesus, are baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit with His gifts. When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all.

a. **They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus:** Having been completely prepared by their response to the preaching of John the Baptist, they are ready to embrace Jesus fully, and are **baptized in the name of Jesus**.

b. After they were baptized, **Paul . . . laid hands on them**, and they were filled with the **Holy Spirit**, and received His gifts.

i. Paul wrote the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians during his stay in the city of Ephesus at this time, and 1 Corinthians has much to say about person and work of the Holy Spirit.

c. **Now the men were about twelve in all** reminds us that not the entire church in Ephesus had this incomplete understanding and embrace of Jesus' person and work, but only a small group.

4. What happened here?

a. It's a tough issue, and full of debate, whether these Ephesian disciples were actually Christians or not before they received this remarkable filling of the Holy Spirit.

i. On the one hand, they are called *disciples* - and appear to part of the company of Christians in Ephesus, things that would not usually be said of them if they were not actually Christians.

ii. On the other hand, they know so little about Jesus; and they are baptized in water again, this time in the name of Jesus.

iii. So were they Christians already or not? It's tough to say - but certainly, Paul perceived they lacked something of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

b. What about you? Would someone look at your life and see a conspicuous absence of the Holy Spirit - His peace and

power - in your life? What do you see when you look at your own life?

i. These Ephesian disciples sensed their need to get right with God, and knew the answer was in God's Messiah - but they had gone no further than that. They need to go all the way, trust in everything Jesus is and everything He had done, and to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Is this where you are at?

ii. "Have ye then received the Spirit since you believed? Beloved, are you now receiving the Spirit? Are you living under his divine influence? Are you filled with his power? Put the question personally. I am afraid some professors will have to admit that they hardly know whether there be any Holy Ghost; and others will have to confess that though they have enjoyed a little of his saving work, yet they do not know much of his ennobling and sanctifying influence." (Spurgeon)

iii. God always wants us to go deeper. We have sipped where we might have drunk deeply, we have drunk deeply where we might have waded, and we have waded where we might have gone full out and plunged in!

c. What if you don't really know? "Perhaps I'm walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit right now, perhaps I'm not. I don't really know." If you are walking in it, you will know!

i. "Give a man an electric shock, and I warrant you he will know it; but if he has the Holy Ghost, he will know it much more." (Spurgeon) This isn't something to *hope* about; we can *know* - just as much as you know if you have a house, and a family, and that there are four quarters to the dollar, you can know you are filled with the Holy Spirit.

ii. Many Christians know little or nothing - mentally or experientially - of the Holy Spirit. Paul's question applies to each of them just as much as it applied to those Ephesian disciples.

B. Paul's continuing ministry in the city of Ephesus.

1. (Act_19:8-10) Paul eventually leaves the synagogue and begins teaching in a borrowed school building.

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

a. **He went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months:** Paul had an extended time of preaching in the synagogue, but eventually, the influence of those Jews rejecting the message drove him out. Then he resumed his teaching in the hall of a Gentile teacher named Tyrannus (**reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus**).

i. One ancient, though not inspired, writings say that Paul held his meetings at the school of Tyrannus from eleven in the morning to four in the afternoon. This would have been the time most people were resting from work, including Paul, who worked to support himself while in Ephesus. These may have also been the “off hours” for the school of Tyrannus.

b. **And this continued for two years:** Paul carried this on for two years, and his effective teaching equipped believers, who got the word of God out to **all who dwelt in Asia**.

i. There is no way that Paul, by himself, could reach this region. But he could equip Christians to do the work of the ministry, just as he described in Eph_4:11-12.

2. (Act_19:11-12) Unusual miracles in Ephesus.

Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.

a. **Now God worked unusual miracles:** Luke states that these were **unusual** miracles, and gives an example, that Paul’s **handkerchiefs or aprons** (literally, “sweat-bands”)

could be laid on a person even without Paul present, that person would be healed or delivered from demonic possession.

i. Literally, the phrase **unusual miracles** could be translated, *miracles not of the ordinary kind*. Even if we should “expect” miracles, these are the unexpected sort!

ii. It was unusual for God to use **handkerchiefs or aprons** in such a way. “The pieces of material were presumably those which Paul used in his tentmaking or leather-working - the sweat-rags for tying around his head and the aprons for tying around his waist.” (Bruce)

b. How did the **handkerchiefs or aprons** work? In the same way that the shadow of Peter (Act_5:15) or the hem of Jesus’ garment (Mat_14:36) might heal: the item became a point of contact by which a person released faith in Jesus as healer.

i. We are not told that *Paul* did these unusual miracles, but that **God worked** them **by the hands of Paul**.

c. We can imagine this happening at first almost by accident - perhaps a person in need of healing took a handkerchief from Paul in a superstitious manner and was healed. But it would soon become a pattern that others imitated.

i. I remember seeing what looked to be loosely rolled up newspapers on a pulpit in Bulgaria, being told they were pieces of fabric (wrapped in newspapers) that the pastor would pray over and they would be taken home to sick people. This was a common practice in these Bulgarian churches.

ii. As we will see, the superstitious practice of magic and sorcery was prevalent in Ephesus. So, it should not surprise us that some took a quite superstitious view of the miracles done through Paul.

d. Observations on these unusual miracles.

i. Note that these were *unusual* miracles; we should not expect that God would continue to use this method to bring healing.

- ii. God delights in doing things in new and different ways; so we *receive* whatever is proven to be from the hand of God, but we *pursue* only that which we have a Biblical pattern for.
- iii. God will stoop down to meet us even in our crude superstitions. This never means that God is pleased with our superstition, but that in His mercy He may overlook them to meet a need.

3. (Act_19:13-16) A rebuke to the seven sons of Sceva, the hopeful Jewish exorcists.

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

a. **Some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists:** At that time, there were Jewish exorcists who practiced their "trade" with a lot of superstition and ceremony. Here, a group of **itinerant Jewish exorcists** try to imitate Paul's "formula" for success.

b. **We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches:** The **Jewish exorcists** failed because they had no personal relationship with Jesus. They only know Jesus is the God of Paul, not their own God.

i. There are many people - many churchgoers - who will perish in Hell because they have no personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They only know "the Jesus the pastor preaches" or of "the Jesus my spouse believes in" instead of the Jesus of their own salvation.

ii. Do you have the "right" to use the name of Jesus? These sons of Sceva did not, because they had no personal relationship with Jesus.

c. **And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?”** The evil spirit knew exactly who Jesus was, and knew exactly who Paul was. But they didn’t know who the **seven sons of Sceva** were.

Apparently, evil spirits know who their enemies are (in this case, **Jesus** and **Paul**), and don’t waste their effort knowing those who aren’t a threat to them (in this case, the **seven sons of Sceva**).

d. **Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them:** Because the **seven sons of Sceva** had no real relationship with Jesus, they had no spiritual power against the **evil spirit**. They left the encounter **naked and wounded**. It was dangerous for them to take the reality of spiritual warfare lightly.

4. (Act_19:17-20) Many in Ephesus renounce objects associated with the demonic.

This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and *it* totaled fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

a. **This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all:** The incident with the sons of Sceva impressed the people with the reality of the demonic realm. It made them fear the Lord and the demonic (both in healthy ways) and **the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified**.

i. “Ephesus was a stronghold of Satan. Here many evil things both superstitious and satanic were practiced. Books containing formula for sorcery and other ungodly and forbidden arts were plentiful in that city.” (Gaebelein) b.

Many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds: Apparently, before the sons of Sceva incident, many believers did not *know* they were involved in the demonic. They saw their actions in a far more innocent light, until they knew the reality of the demonic.

c. **Many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all:** The sons of Sceva incident also prompted Christians to renounce any remaining connection to the demonic. They renounced the demonic by **confessing** and by burning their magic books, disregarding whatever value they might have.

i. It is significant that these practitioners of magic **came confessing and telling their deeds**; it was thought that the power of these magic spells resided in their *secrecy*, which was renounced in the telling.

ii. These **books** and scrolls full of magic charms, amulets and incantations were well known in Ephesus, and they were valuable. The drachma was a silver coin representing about a one-fourth a day's wage, and if we estimate 300 working days a year, at an income of \$25,000, this amount represented more than \$1 million!.

iii. Christians must do this also today, removing books, tapes, records, statues, charms, games, or whatever else might have connection with demonic spirits. They should also destroy them so they are of no use to others.

iv. "You will have enough temptation in your own mind without going after these things. Is there any habit, any practice, that you have got that defiles your soul? If Christ loves you, and you come and trust in him, you will make short work of it. Have done with it, and have done with it forever." (Spurgeon)

d. The end result was obviously worth it all: **The word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.**

C. The riot in Ephesus.

1. (Act_19:21-22) Paul's companions leave him alone in Ephesus.

When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.

a. **Paul purposed in the Spirit:** Guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul determined his itinerary. He would travel through Macedonia and Achaia, then to Jerusalem, then to Rome.

i. Luke doesn't mention it here, but we know that one reason why Paul wanted to go through Macedonia and Achaia, then to Jerusalem was to collect and deliver a fund he had been collecting from other churches to help out the church in Jerusalem (Rom_15:25-31; 1Co_16:1-4).

b. **So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus:** Paul sent Timothy and Erastus on ahead to Macedonia, while he stayed in Ephesus (Asia) for a time.

c. **Who ministered to him:** Notice the job of Timothy and Erastus. They **ministered to** Paul; they were truly assistants to the apostle, helping Paul to maximize his ministry.

2. (Act_19:23-28) Demetrius, a maker of idols, opposes Paul because his business has suffered.

And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world

worship.” Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, “Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!”

a. **This trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed:**

This tremendous temple to Diana (also known as Artemis) in Ephesus was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was supported by 127 pillars, each 60 feet high, and was adorned with great sculptures. It was completely lost to history until 1869, when it was discovered again, and its main altar was unearthed in 1965.

i. “The Temple of Artemis was also a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be kept safe under the protection of deity.” (Longenecker) ii. **Whom**

all Asia and the world worship: The temple of Diana in Ephesus was indeed famous around the world; and trinkets and idols from it must have been a substantial trade, no matter how immoral the worship of the sex-goddess was.

b. **This Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands:**

The opposition of Demetrius and the other idol makers is a great compliment to the effectiveness of Paul’s work in the region. Paul was not on a “let’s close down the temple of Diana” campaign, he was just doing the Lord’s work.

As people came to Jesus, they naturally stopped worshipping Diana and buying shrines associated with the temple.

i. In verse 37, the city clerk specifically says that Paul had not blasphemed the goddess Diana. He was on a “pro-Jesus” campaign more than an “anti-everything else” campaign.

ii. This is how we should endeavor to change society. “I wish the gospel would affect the trade of London; I wish it might. There are some trades that need affecting, need to be cut a little shorter . . . Not by an Act of Parliament!

Let Acts of Parliament leave us alone. We can fight that battle alone. But may it come to an end by the spread of the gospel . . . I have no faith in any reformation that does not come through men's hearts being changed."

(Spurgeon)

3. (Act_19:29-34) The riot builds momentum.

So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!"

a. **The whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord:** Considering Rome's iron-fisted attitude towards such civil disorder, things were rapidly getting out of hand.

b. **They drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward:** Alexander wanted to make sure that the mob knew that the Jews did not approve of Paul either; but he accomplished nothing before the angry crowd.

c. The chant **Great Diana of the Ephesians!** must have sent a chill up the backs of the Christians, including Paul who no doubt could hear it from outside the theater.

i. "The noise must have been deafening. The acoustics of the theater are excellent even today and at that time were even better because of bronze and clay sounding vessels placed throughout the auditorium." (Williams)

4. (Act_19:35-41) The city clerk is able to calm the passion of the crowd.

And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Zeus? Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering." And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

a. **Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly:** The **city clerk** speaks sensible words; Luke is trying to show that rational people see nothing to fear or oppose in Christianity.

i. The **city clerk** was actually what we would consider the "mayor" of the city.

b. **He dismissed the assembly:** God used the city clerk to calm the mob and end the immediate threat to Paul and the other Christians. God had preserved His work, and His people, again.

i. **Assembly** in Act_19:41 is the Greek word *ekklesia*, the same word used for "church." It was a non-religious term used to describe a gathering or association of people.

(Act 19:2) and said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"⁸ They replied,⁹ "No, we have not even¹⁰ heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

(Act 19:3) So Paul¹¹ said, "Into what then were you baptized?" "Into John's baptism," they replied.¹²

(Act 19:4) Paul said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him,¹³

that is, in Jesus."

(Act 19:5) When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus,

(Act 19:6) and when Paul placed¹⁴ his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came¹⁵ upon them, and they began to speak¹⁶ in tongues and to prophesy.¹⁷

(Act 19:7) (Now there were about twelve men in all.)¹⁸

(Act 19:8) ***Paul Continues to Minister at Ephesus***

So Paul¹⁹ entered²⁰ the synagogue²¹ and spoke out fearlessly²² for three months, addressing²³ and convincing²⁴ them about the kingdom of God.²⁵

(Act 19:9) But when²⁶ some were stubborn²⁷ and refused to believe, reviling²⁸ the Way²⁹ before the congregation, he left³⁰ them and took the disciples with him,³¹ addressing³² them every day³³ in the lecture hall³⁴ of Tyrannus.

(Act 19:10) This went on for two years, so that all who lived in the province of Asia,³⁵ both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.³⁶

(Act 19:11) ***The Seven Sons of Sceva***

God was performing extraordinary³⁷ miracles by Paul's hands,

(Act 19:12) so that when even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his body³⁸ were brought³⁹ to the sick, their diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.⁴⁰

(Act 19:13) But some itinerant⁴¹ Jewish exorcists tried to invoke the name⁴² of the Lord Jesus over those who were possessed by⁴³ evil spirits, saying, "I sternly warn⁴⁴ you by Jesus whom Paul preaches."

(Act 19:14) (Now seven sons of a man named⁴⁵ Sceva, a Jewish high priest, were doing this.)⁴⁶

(Act 19:15) But the evil spirit replied to them,⁴⁷ "I know about Jesus⁴⁸ and I am acquainted with⁴⁹ Paul, but who are you?"⁵⁰

(Act 19:16) Then the man who was possessed by⁵¹ the evil spirit jumped on⁵² them and beat them all into submission.⁵³ He prevailed⁵⁴

against them so that they fled from that house naked and wounded.

(Act 19:17) This became known to all who lived in Ephesus,⁵⁵ both Jews and Greeks; fear came over⁵⁶ them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised.⁵⁷

(Act 19:18) Many of those who had believed came forward,⁵⁸ confessing and making their deeds known.⁵⁹

(Act 19:19) Large numbers⁶⁰ of those who had practiced magic⁶¹ collected their books⁶² and burned them up in the presence of everyone.⁶³ When⁶⁴ the value of the books was added up, it was found to total fifty thousand silver coins.⁶⁵

(Act 19:20) In this way the word of the Lord⁶⁶ continued to grow in power⁶⁷ and to prevail.⁶⁸

(Act 19:21) ***A Riot in Ephesus***

Now after all these things had taken place,⁶⁹ Paul resolved⁷⁰ to go to Jerusalem,⁷¹ passing through Macedonia⁷² and Achaia.⁷³

He said,⁷⁴ "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."⁷⁵

(Act 19:22) So after sending⁷⁶ two of his assistants,⁷⁷ Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia,⁷⁸ he himself stayed on for a while in the province of Asia.⁷⁹

(Act 19:23) At⁸⁰ that time⁸¹ a great disturbance⁸² took place concerning the Way.⁸³

(Act 19:24) For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines⁸⁴ of Artemis,⁸⁵ brought a great deal⁸⁶ of business⁸⁷ to the craftsmen.

(Act 19:25) He gathered⁸⁸ these⁸⁹ together, along with the workmen in similar trades,⁹⁰ and said, "Men, you know that

our prosperity⁹¹ comes from this business.

(Act 19:26) And you see and hear that this Paul has persuaded⁹² and turned away⁹³ a large crowd,⁹⁴ not only in Ephesus⁹⁵ but in practically all of the province of Asia,⁹⁶ by saying⁹⁷ that gods made by hands are not gods at all.⁹⁸

(Act 19:27) There is danger not only that this business of ours will come into disrepute,⁹⁹ but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis¹⁰⁰ will be regarded as nothing,¹⁰¹ and she whom all the province of Asia¹⁰² and the world worship will suffer the loss of her greatness."¹⁰³

(Act 19:28) When¹⁰⁴ they heard¹⁰⁵ this they became enraged¹⁰⁶ and began to shout,¹⁰⁷ "Great is Artemis¹⁰⁸ of the Ephesians!"

(Act 19:29) The¹⁰⁹ city was filled with the uproar,¹¹⁰ and the crowd¹¹¹ rushed to the theater¹¹² together,¹¹³ dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, the Macedonians who were Paul's traveling companions.

(Act 19:30) But when Paul wanted to enter the public assembly,¹¹⁴ the disciples would not let him.

(Act 19:31) Even some of the provincial authorities¹¹⁵ who were his friends sent¹¹⁶ a message¹¹⁷ to him, urging him not to venture¹¹⁸

into the theater.

(Act 19:32) So then some were shouting one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had met together.¹¹⁹

(Act 19:33) Some of the crowd concluded¹²⁰ it was about¹²¹ Alexander because the Jews had pushed him to the front.¹²² Alexander, gesturing¹²³ with his hand, was wanting to make a defense¹²⁴ before the public assembly.¹²⁵

(Act 19:34) But when they recognized¹²⁶ that he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison,¹²⁷ "Great is Artemis¹²⁸ of the Ephesians!" for about two hours.¹²⁹

(Act 19:35) After the city secretary¹³⁰ quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, what person¹³¹ is there who does

not know that the city of the Ephesians is the keeper¹³² of the temple of the great Artemis¹³³ and of her image that fell from heaven?¹³⁴

(Act 19:36) So because these facts¹³⁵ are indisputable,¹³⁶ you must keep quiet¹³⁷ and not do anything reckless.¹³⁸

(Act 19:37) For you have brought these men here who are neither temple robbers¹³⁹ nor blasphemers of our goddess.¹⁴⁰

(Act 19:38) If then Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint¹⁴¹ against someone, the courts are open¹⁴² and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges against one another there.¹⁴³

(Act 19:39) But if you want anything in addition,¹⁴⁴ it will have to be settled¹⁴⁵ in a legal assembly.¹⁴⁶

(Act 19:40) For¹⁴⁷ we are in danger of being charged with rioting¹⁴⁸ today, since there is no cause we can give to explain¹⁴⁹ this disorderly gathering."¹⁵⁰

(Act 19:41) After¹⁵¹ he had said¹⁵² this,¹⁵³ he dismissed the assembly.¹⁵⁴

(Act 20:1) ***Paul Travels Through Macedonia and Greece***

After the disturbance had ended, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging¹ them and saying farewell,² he left to go to Macedonia.³

(Guzik)

Act 20:1-38

Acts 20 - PAUL'S FAREWELL TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

A. Paul in the region of Macedonia again.

1. (Act_20:1) From Ephesus, Paul travels to Macedonia.

After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to *himself*, embraced *them*, and departed to go to Macedonia.

a. **After the uproar had ceased:** The rioting in Ephesus (Acts 19) had convinced Paul to move on, so he went westward across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia (modern Greece).

2. (Act_20:2-5) Travels through Greece and Macedonia.

Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia; also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas.

a. **When he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words:** Paul spent his time working with the churches he had already established, as recorded in Acts 16-17.

i. "One activity that especially concerned Paul at this time was collecting money for the relief of impoverished believers at Jerusalem . . . Paul viewed it as a symbol of unity that would help his Gentile converts realize their debt to the mother church in Jerusalem." (Longenecker)

b. **When the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.** Paul had planned to take the long journey by sea directly back to Syria (where his sending church at Antioch was), but the plotting of anti-Christian Jews made him take a more overland route back through Macedonia, accompanied by many companions.

i. "It may have been planned to attack him on board ship, especially if the vessel was crowded with Jewish pilgrims for Passover or Pentecost." (Williams)

c. **Sopater of Berea . . . Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians . . . Gaius of Derbe . . . Trophimus of Asia:** These traveling companions of Paul were probably representatives from other churches who had sent money with Paul to Jerusalem. They were also present as ambassadors from the churches Paul has founded among the Gentiles, and were there to vouch for Paul's good stewardship in regard to the collection destined for Jerusalem.

B. Back to Troas and the region of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey).

1. (Act_20:6) Arrival at the city of Troas.

But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

a. **We sailed away from Philippi . . . joined them at Troas:** Paul has now sailed back across the Aegean Sea, eastward towards the Roman province of Asia Minor.

2. (Act_20:7-12) A long sermon and Eutychus raised from the dead.

Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together.

And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing *him* said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him." Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted.

a. **Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread:** This is the first *certain* example we have of Christians making a practice to gather together on the first day of the week for fellowship and the word - though here, it seems they gathered in the evening, because Sunday was a normal working day for them.

b. **Spoke to them and continued his message until midnight:** Paul sensed the need to carry on long because he was **ready to depart the next day**; he knew he might

never see these particular Christians again - so he preached for some six hours to them!

c. **A certain young man named Eutychus . . . fell down from the third story and was taken up dead:** The combination of the late hour and the heat and perhaps fumes from the oil lamps made the young man Eutychus fall asleep.

His fall and death certainly would have put a damper on the meeting!

d. **Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him:** Paul, again receiving the gift of faith from God, sensed that God would raise this boy from the dead - and God did.

i. "Paul's comment that the boy's *life* was *in him* refers to his condition after he had ministered to him. Luke would not have devoted space to the raising up of somebody who was merely apparently dead." (Marshall) e. **Talked a long while, even till daybreak:** Paul, obviously getting their attention back, continued preaching until daybreak!

C. Paul's address to the Ephesian elders.

1. (Act_20:13-17) Paul comes to Miletus and sends for the elders of the church in Ephesus to meet him there.

Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. We sailed from there, and the next *day* came opposite Chios. The following *day* we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next *day* we came to Miletus.

For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.

a. **Intending himself to go on foot:** Paul apparently preferred to walk from Troas to Assos instead of sail with the rest of his group; but he sailed with them from Assos to Miletus (**we took him on board**).

i. Paul “stayed till the last possible moment, probably to be assured of Eutychus’s complete restoration to consciousness and health, and then took a shortcut by land to join the ship at Assos.” (Bruce).

b. **Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus:** Paul’s intention wasn’t to slight the church in Ephesus, but he knew that it would be impossible for him to have a *short* visit there, and he wanted to hurry so as to be **at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.**

c. **From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church:** Though Paul knew he couldn’t make a *brief* visit to Ephesus, he still wanted to pour his heart into the leaders of the church at Ephesus. So, **from Miletus**, he **called for the elders of the church** to come for a special meeting.

2. (Act_20:18-21) Paul begins his farewell to the elders of Ephesus by recounting his work among them.

And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

a. Most of the time in Acts, we see Paul the evangelist; but here in Acts 20, we get a unique picture of Paul the pastor - what was important to him as a leader and shepherd of God’s people.

i. “It is the only Pauline speech delivered to Christians which Luke has recorded, and it is not surprising to discover how rich it is in parallels to the Pauline letters (especially, in fact, to the later ones).” (Bruce)

b. **You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you:** Paul first calls

attention to himself as an example. Not an example *instead* of Jesus, but an example as he follows Jesus. Paul didn't act like a "religious celebrity" and expect people to serve and honor him; he just wanted to be **serving the Lord with all humility**.

i. If you aren't an example of how to live the Christian life, why not? You might say, "well, because I'm a new Christian." Then are you a good example of how a new Christian should live?

c. **I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you:** Paul could solemnly say before these elders of the Ephesian church that he **kept back nothing that was helpful**. He didn't only teach the topics that pleased him.

He **proclaimed it** all.

i. **Testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks:** if Paul didn't limit his message, he didn't limit his audience either.

He wanted to preach all the word of God to all people.

d. **From house to house** implies that the Ephesian church, lacking any central building, was organized logically in house-churches. Probably, each elder had charge over a particular house-church.

3. (Act_20:22-27) Paul reveals his heart and mind to the Ephesian elders.

"And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."

a. **I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there:** Paul didn't know what was ahead of him; he even had reason to believe it was bad. But that didn't trouble him. He could give it all over to God even when he didn't know what would happen.

May God give us more Christians who will say **none of these things move me!**

i. *Uncertainty* did not move Paul. Even though he was **not knowing the things that will happen to me there**, he would not be moved from his cause. Paul could sing this Psalm from his heart: *I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.* (Psa_16:8)

b. **Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me:** Paul recognized the dangerous road ahead of him; apparently he had received many words of prophecy telling him of this danger already. Yet he is not dissuaded by danger, but willing to lay down his life for **the gospel of the grace of God**.

i. **Nor do I count my life dear to myself:** Paul thought of himself as an *accountant*, weighing carefully the credits and the expenses; and in the end, he does not count his own life dear to him, compared to his God and how he can serve him.

ii. **So that I may finish my race with joy:** Paul thought of himself as a *runner* who had a race to finish, and nothing would keep Paul from finishing the race with joy. Additionally, Paul speaks of *my race* - he had his race to run, we have our own - but God calls us to finish it with joy.

c. **I am innocent of the blood of all men:** Paul declared his heart was clear. He could leave these Christians to God's care with a good conscience, knowing that he has **not shunned to declare to [them] the whole counsel of God**.

i. **The whole counsel of God:** Paul thought of himself as a *watchman*, there to bring forth the whole counsel of God's word. This doesn't guarantee the people will be saved, but it will guarantee Paul is without guilt before God.

He has done his job!

ii. Where are those who today declare the whole counsel of God? Paul warned that in the last days, people would

not endure sound doctrine, but look for teachers who would tell them what they want to hear - teachers who will scratch their itching ears (2Ti_4:3).

iii. Many preachers today simply use a Bible text as a launching pad, and then go on to say what they want - what the people want to hear. Others throw in Bible quotations to illustrate their points, or to illustrate their stories!

But who will simply let the Bible speak for itself and let it declare its own power? Taking Paul's testimony at full strength, we must say that those preachers who deliberately fail to **declare . . . the whole counsel of God** *are guilty of the blood of all men*. The preacher who preaches what his audience wants to hear, and not **the whole counsel of God**, hurts both his audience and himself!

iv. We also must demand that we are being taught the **whole** counsel of God; not just interesting topics, not just what we want to hear, not just the things that will "grab" people, but what God says to all of our lives.

v. "That man does not preach the whole counsel of God who does not let God's Word speak for itself in its own pure, simple language . . . He will not shirk the truth. He will dare to look at it straight in the face himself and then he will bring it up into the pulpit, and there say to it, 'O Word, speak for thyself, and be thou heard alone. Suffer me not, O Lord, to pervert or misinterpret thine own heaven-sent truth.'" (Spurgeon)

4. (Act_20:28-35) Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders to continue in godly ministry.

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not

cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

a. Paul's counsel to the elders is plain: **Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock.** The godly leader knows that effective leadership flows from a life, not just knowledge.

i. Also important to leaders is the principle that the church belongs to God, because **He purchased [it] with His own blood.** The people don't belong to the pastor; they belong to the Lord. As long as they choose to remain under the care and leadership of that pastor, he has a responsibility before God to feed and lead them; but they never belong to him.

b. **Take heed . . . to all the flock . . . to shepherd the church of God . . . therefore watch:** Taking care of God's people basically amounts to two things. First, being a *shepherd* to the flock; secondly, *watching* over them, protecting them from danger.

i. The first idea behind being a shepherd is *feeding* God's people. "They are to *be shepherds* of God's church, *poimanino* meaning in general to *tend* a flock and in particular *to lead a flock to pasture and so to feed it*. This is the first duty of shepherds." (Stott) ii. But it isn't enough to feed; the shepherd must also protect the sheep. **Watch** applies both to **savage wolves** that come in from the outside and to those who rise up **from among yourselves**.

iii. It is often easier for pastors to deal with the wolves that come from the outside - obviously false teachings and goofy winds of doctrine. But it is very difficult to deal with those who rise up **from among yourselves**, because you don't want to believe that they are in fact **speaking perverse things** and trying **to draw away the disciples after themselves**. But Paul insisted that such people were real, and that pastors would have to deal with them!

c. **Therefore watch**: Paul knew that spiritual attack would rise up **among** the church itself; we should be aware that Satan likes to attack through infiltration - so pastors must **watch**.

i. 2Ti_1:15 and Rev_2:4 prove that Paul's concerns for the church in Ephesus were justified.

d. Though Paul gave his all for the Christians in Ephesus for some three years, at the bottom line, he can only **commend** [them] **to God and the word of His grace**.

i. Programs can't do it; the spirit of the age can't do it; slick marketing can't do it; entertainment can't do it; only God and the Word of His grace can **build you up and give you an inheritance** in heaven.

e. **I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel**: Paul concludes by trying to communicate his heart, his *motive* in ministry. He wasn't in it for himself, but for God's glory and for the building up of God's people. **Laboring like this** means that Paul was a hard worker for God's glory!

f. His parting words, taken from a quote of Jesus' unrecorded in the gospels, are perfect for all who would minister to God's people: **It is more blessed to give than to receive**. Ministers must be more concerned about what they can give their flock than concerned about what their flock can give them.

i. This is the best beatitude of all. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us how to be blessed; here, He tells us how to be **more** blessed!

ii. It should not stumble us to consider that Jesus taught many things unrecorded in the gospels; John said as much in Joh_21:25. But we can trust that God has preserved all that is necessary of the teaching of Jesus.

5. (Act_20:36-38) Paul's tearful good-bye to the Ephesian elders.

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

a. **That they would see his face no more:** They part with prayer, tears, and a sending-off party, believing they would only meet again in eternity.

b. This reminds us that Paul was not a cold dispenser of doctrine, but a warm, pastoral man who loved his people greatly and won great love from them.

(Act 20:2) After he had gone through those regions⁴ and spoken many words of encouragement⁵ to the believers there,⁶ he came to Greece,⁷

(Act 20:3) where he stayed⁸ for three months. Because the Jews had made⁹ a plot¹⁰ against him as he was intending¹¹ to sail¹² for Syria, he decided¹³ to return through Macedonia.¹⁴

(Act 20:4) Paul¹⁵ was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea,¹⁶ Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica,¹⁷ Gaius¹⁸

from Derbe,¹⁹ and Timothy, as well as Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia.²⁰

(Act 20:5) These had gone on ahead²¹ and were waiting for us in Troas.²²

(Act 20:6) We²³ sailed away from Philippi²⁴ after the days of Unleavened Bread,²⁵ and within five days²⁶ we came to the others²⁷ in Troas,²⁸ where we stayed for seven days.

(Act 20:7) On the first day²⁹ of the week, when we met³⁰ to break bread, Paul began to speak³¹ to the people, and

because he intended³² to leave the next day, he extended³³ his message until midnight.

(Act 20:8) (Now there were many lamps³⁴ in the upstairs room where we were meeting.)³⁵

(Act 20:9) A young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in the window,³⁶ was sinking³⁷ into a deep sleep while Paul continued to speak³⁸ for a long time. Fast asleep,³⁹ he fell down from the third story and was picked up dead.

(Act 20:10) But Paul went down,⁴⁰ threw himself⁴¹ on the young man,⁴² put his arms around him,⁴³ and said, "Do not be distressed, for he is still alive!"⁴⁴

(Act 20:11) Then Paul⁴⁵ went back upstairs,⁴⁶ and after he had broken bread and eaten, he talked with them⁴⁷ a long time, until dawn.

Then he left.

(Act 20:12) They took the boy home alive and were greatly⁴⁸ comforted.

(Act 20:13) ***The Voyage to Miletus***

We went on ahead⁴⁹ to the ship and put out to sea⁵⁰ for Assos,⁵¹ intending⁵² to take Paul aboard there, for he had arranged it this way.⁵³ He⁵⁴ himself was intending⁵⁵ to go there by land.⁵⁶

(Act 20:14) When he met us in Assos,⁵⁷ we took him aboard⁵⁸ and went to Mitylene.⁵⁹

(Act 20:15) We set sail⁶⁰ from there, and on the following day we arrived off Chios.⁶¹ The next day we approached⁶² Samos,⁶³ and the day after that we arrived at Miletus.⁶⁴

(Act 20:16) For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus⁶⁵ so as not to spend time⁶⁶ in the province of Asia,⁶⁷ for he was hurrying⁶⁸ to arrive in Jerusalem,⁶⁹ if possible,⁷⁰ by the day of Pentecost.

(Act 20:17) From Miletus⁷¹ he sent a message⁷² to Ephesus, telling the elders of the church to come to him.⁷³

(Act 20:18) When they arrived, he said to them, "You yourselves know how I lived⁷⁴ the whole time I was with

you, from the first day I set foot⁷⁵ in the province of Asia,⁷⁶ (Act 20:19) serving the Lord with all humility⁷⁷ and with tears, and with the trials that happened to me because of the plots⁷⁸ of the Jews.

(Act 20:20) You know that I did not hold back from proclaiming⁷⁹ to you anything that would be helpful,⁸⁰ and from teaching you publicly⁸¹ and from house to house, (Act 20:21) testifying⁸² to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.⁸³

(Act 20:22) And now,⁸⁴ compelled⁸⁵ by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem⁸⁶ without knowing what will happen to me there,⁸⁷

(Act 20:23) except⁸⁸ that the Holy Spirit warns⁸⁹ me in town after town⁹⁰ that⁹¹ imprisonment⁹² and persecutions⁹³ are waiting for me.

(Act 20:24) But I do not consider my life⁹⁴ worth anything⁹⁵ to myself, so that⁹⁶ I may finish my task⁹⁷ and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news⁹⁸ of God's grace.

(Act 20:25) "And now⁹⁹ I know that none¹⁰⁰ of you among whom I went around proclaiming the kingdom¹⁰¹ will see me¹⁰² again.

(Act 20:26) Therefore I declare¹⁰³ to you today that I am innocent¹⁰⁴ of the blood of you all.¹⁰⁵

(Act 20:27) For I did not hold back from¹⁰⁶ announcing¹⁰⁷ to you the whole purpose¹⁰⁸ of God.

(Act 20:28) Watch out for¹⁰⁹ yourselves and for all the flock of which¹¹⁰ the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,¹¹¹ to shepherd the church of God¹¹² that he obtained¹¹³ with the blood of his own Son.¹¹⁴

(Act 20:29) I know that after I am gone¹¹⁵ fierce wolves¹¹⁶ will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

(Act 20:30) Even from among your own group¹¹⁷ men¹¹⁸ will arise, teaching perversions of the truth¹¹⁹ to draw the disciples away after them.

(Act 20:31) Therefore be alert,¹²⁰ remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning¹²¹ each one of you with tears.

(Act 20:32) And now I entrust¹²² you to God and to the message¹²³ of his grace. This message¹²⁴ is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

(Act 20:33) I have desired¹²⁵ no one's silver or gold or clothing.

(Act 20:34) You yourselves know that these hands of mine¹²⁶ provided for my needs and the needs of those who were with me.

(Act 20:35) By all these things,¹²⁷ I have shown you that by working in this way we must help¹²⁸ the weak,¹²⁹ and remember the words of the Lord Jesus that he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "¹³⁰

(Act 20:36) When¹³¹ he had said these things, he knelt down¹³² with them all and prayed.

(Act 20:37) They all began to weep loudly,¹³³ and hugged¹³⁴ Paul and kissed him,¹³⁵

(Act 20:38) especially saddened¹³⁶ by what¹³⁷ he had said, that they were not going to see him¹³⁸ again. Then they accompanied¹³⁹ him to the ship.

(Act 21:1) ***Paul's Journey to Jerusalem***

After¹ we² tore ourselves away³ from them, we put out to sea,⁴ and sailing a straight course,⁵ we came to Cos,⁶ on the next day to Rhodes,⁷ and from there to Patara.⁸

(Guzik)

Act 21:1-40

Acts 21 - PAUL ARRIVES IN JERUSALEM

A. Events on the way from Asia Minor to Jerusalem.

1. (Act 21:1-6) Sailing to Syria, Paul is warned again in the city of Tyre.

Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following *day* to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till *we were* out of the city.

And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.

a. **Departed from them** is more literally *tore ourselves away from them*; this was not an easy parting! Paul had poured his life and love into these leaders from Ephesus, and they loved him deeply in return.

b. **Landed at Tyre . . . and finding disciples**: We are not told how a church was planted in Tyre, but there were **disciples** there. This reminds us that the Book of Acts gives only a partial picture of the early church's activity.

c. **They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem**: Apparently, among the disciples at Tyre, some prophesied of the danger that awaited Paul in Jerusalem, something that he had been warned about before in several other places (Act_20:22-23).

d. It would seem that the specific warning **not to go up to Jerusalem** was a human interpretation of the Holy Spirit's prophecy of the danger that awaited Paul, otherwise it is difficult to see why Paul would have gone against the Holy Spirit's direction.

e. **They all accompanied us . . . till we were out of the city**: The practice of accompanying a traveler to the outskirts of the city was traditional. **And we knelt down on**

the shore and prayed: The practice of kneeling down on the shore together for prayer was uniquely Christian.

2. (Act_21:7-16) Paul is warned another time in the city of Caesarea.

And when we had finished *our* voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day. On the next *day* we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was *one* of the seven, and stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.'" Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.

a. **We came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day:** It must have been wonderful for Paul and his companions to find Christians in virtually every city they stopped in. These bonds of fellowship become all the more precious when one is traveling and a stranger in a city.

b. **Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven:** Apparently, Philip, **one of the seven** chosen in Acts 6 to serve tables, settled in Caesarea and had four daughters who had the gift of prophecy.

i. According to ancient records, “The daughters, or at least some of them, lived to a great age, and were highly esteemed as informants on persons and events belonging to the early years of Judean Christianity.” (Bruce)

c. **A certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea:** In the spirit of Old Testament prophets, Agabus “play-acts” his message to Paul - that certain danger awaits him at Jerusalem.

i. Significantly, the daughters of Philip did not prophesy about Paul’s trip to Jerusalem, though we might have expected them to. The Holy Spirit chooses whom He will for such manifestations of the Spirit.

d. **So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles:** The prophecy of Agabus was true, and genuinely from the Holy Spirit. But to this true word, they added a human application (they **pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem**). That additional word was not of the Lord, otherwise Paul would have been disobedient to go to Jerusalem.

i. Though their human application was understandable, even logical, it wasn’t of God. They recognized as much when they attributed Paul’s insistence to go to Jerusalem despite the danger as **the will of the Lord**. It is easy to do - and a source of trouble - when we “add our two cents” to what God may be saying, often thinking that it is also from the Lord.

ii. Paul had received several prophetic words on this very topic. This is God’s custom with such a remarkable prophecy, that there should be great deal of confirmation, as there was in Macedonia (Act_20:22-23), in Tyre (Act_21:4) and now in Caesarea.

e. **For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus:** Paul’s insistence on going to Jerusalem despite the dangers predicted by the Holy Spirit was not a result of rebellion, but

an obedient response to the command of the Holy Spirit in his heart. He was *bound in the spirit* to go to Jerusalem (Act_19:21; Act_20:22).

i. The warnings from the Holy Spirit were intended to *prepare* Paul, not to *stop* him.

B. Paul comes to Jerusalem.

1. (Act_21:17-26) Paul honors Jewish customs among Christian Jews in Jerusalem.

And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs. What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave *their* heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but *that* you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law. But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written *and* decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality." Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

a. **He told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry:** Upon arriving

in Jerusalem, Paul met with the leaders of the church there (**James** and **all the elders**), and gave them a full report of his ministry.

i. Williams on **told in detail**: “The Greek has the sense of recounting every single thing.” Paul told these Christians from a Jewish background everything God had done in his missionary efforts.

b. The Christian Jews in Jerusalem were thankful for what God was doing among the Gentiles (**And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord**). Yet they still wanted to maintain many of their own Jewish customs and practices (**they are all zealous for the law**).

c. **Be purified with them, and pay their expenses**: Leaders of the church in Jerusalem were concerned that Paul was *against* the Jewish customs the Jewish believers in Jerusalem still valued. So, the leaders advised Paul to “sponsor” (pay the sacrificial expenses) four Christian Jews who are fulfilling a vow of consecration. By this, Paul will show the community of Christian Jews in Jerusalem that he is not opposed to their continued observance of certain Jewish customs, though he does not require such observance of Gentiles who come to Jesus.

i. **Four men who have taken a vow**: The particular vow of consecration was probably similar to Paul’s Nazirite vow mentioned in Act_18:18.

d. Paul did this to demonstrate that he never taught Christian Jews **to forsake Moses** and **not to circumcise their children** and that they should ignore Jewish customs.

e. **Then Paul took the men**: Paul could agree to this and sponsor the four men taking the vow of consecration because there was never a hint that such things would be required of Gentiles as a test of righteousness.

i. “He had shown them that their ceremonies were *useless* but not *destructive*; that they were only dangerous when they depended on them for salvation.” (Clarke) f. The motive behind Paul’s sponsorship of these Christian Jews

completing their Nazirite vow is explained in 1Co_9:20 : *And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.*

2. (Act_21:27-30) Jews from Asia stir a mob against Paul.

Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

a. **Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd:** They claimed that Paul was **against the people** [Israel] , **the law, and this place** [the temple], but this was unfounded. Paul simply rejected trust in any of these as a basis for righteousness before God, which comes only through Jesus Christ.

i. The charges against Paul in Act_21:28 are an echo of the charges Stephen was executed for (Act_6:13).

b. **All the city was disturbed; and the people ran together:** The crowd was *enlarged* because it was feast-time (Act_20:16). It was *enraged* because they believed Paul not only preached against the people, the law, and the temple, but also profaned the temple by bringing a Gentile into its inner courts (they said, “**he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place**”).

c. **Trophimus the Ephesian . . . whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple:** It was absolutely prohibited for Gentiles to go beyond the designated “Court of the Gentiles” in the temple grounds.

Signs were posted which read (in both Greek and Latin): “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and

enclosure. Any one who is caught trespassing will bear personal responsibility for his ensuing death.” The Romans were so sensitive to this that they authorized the Jews to execute anyone that offended in this way, even if the offender was a Roman citizen.

3. (Act_21:31-39) Roman soldiers rescue Paul.

Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, “Away with him!” Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I speak to you?” He replied, “Can you speak Greek? Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?” But Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.”

a. **Now as they were seeking to kill him:** Paul has been seized by an enraged mob, and the mob didn’t just want to take him out of the temple courts. They wanted to kill him, right there in the outer courtyard area of the temple mount. Paul had been near death because of the attacks of murderous mobs before (Act_14:5; Act_14:19), and he must have

thought, “Here we go again!”

b. **News came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar:** From the Tower of Antonia, at the northwest corner of the temple mount, more than 500 Roman soldiers were stationed only two flights of stairs from the court of the Gentiles.

c. **When they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul:** The Romans didn’t sympathize with Paul, but they were interested in keeping public order, and they arrested Paul both for his own protection and to remove the cause of the uproar.

i. **Two chains** means Paul was handcuffed to a soldier on either side. Paul must have immediately remembered the prophecy of Agabus (Act_21:11).

d. **The multitude of the people followed after, crying out, “Away with him!”** When the mob cried out for his death, Paul must have remembered when he was part of such a mob, agreeing with the martyrdom of Stephen (Act_7:54 to Act_8:1).

i. Or, perhaps, it even reminded him of the trial of Jesus: “The shout *Away with him!* which pursued him as he was carried up the steps was the shout with which Jesus’ death had been demanded not far from that spot some twenty-seven years before (Luk_23:18; Joh_19:15).” (Bruce)

e. At first, the Roman **commander** thought that Paul was a terrorist, and was surprised that Paul was an educated man and could **speak Greek**.

i. **The Egyptian** mentioned (also mentioned by Josephus) led a ragged army of four thousand men to the Mount of Olives where they declared they would take over the temple mount. Roman soldiers had quickly scattered them, but the leader got away.

f. **I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city:** When Paul identified himself to the Roman commander, it put him in an entirely different standing. He was a citizen of **Tarsus**, not a suspected terrorist.

g. **I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.** At this moment, when his life was in danger from an angry mob and he was suspected of being a dangerous criminal, Paul had one thing on his mind: "Let me preach the gospel!"

4. (Act_21:40) Paul is permitted to address the mob that wanted to kill him.

So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language, saying,

a. **So when he had given him permission:** Why did the commander permit Paul to speak to the crowd? Because he had recognized that he had done wrong to Paul, a Roman citizen, when he bound him with chains (Act_21:33), and because he hoped that Paul's speech might quiet down the mob.

b. **Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language:** what a dramatic moment! Paul, standing on stairs overlooking the massive open courtyard of the temple mount, made a dramatic sweep of his hand - and the angry, rioting mob fell silent.

Then, Paul **spoke to them in the Hebrew language**, identifying himself with his Jewish audience, not with his Roman protectors.

i. This was an opportunity Paul had waited a lifetime for. He had an incredible passion for the salvation of his fellow Jews (Rom_9:1-5), and had probably thought of himself as uniquely qualified to effectively communicate the gospel to them - if he only had the right opportunity.

5. Similarities between Jesus and Paul as shown in Acts 20, 21 :

a. Like Jesus, Paul traveled to Jerusalem with a group of disciples.

- b. Like Jesus, Paul had opposition from hostile Jews who plotted against his life.
- c. Like Jesus, Paul made or received three successive predictions of his coming sufferings in Jerusalem, including being handed over to the Gentiles.
- d. Like Jesus, Paul had followers who tried to discourage him from going to Jerusalem and the fate that awaited him there.
- e. Like Jesus, Paul declared his readiness to lay down his life.
- f. Like Jesus, he was determined to complete his ministry and not be deflected from it.
- g. Like Jesus, Paul expressed his abandonment to the will of God.
- h. Like Jesus, Paul came to Jerusalem to *give* something.
- i. Like Jesus, Paul was unjustly arrested on the basis of a false accusation.
- j. Like Jesus, Paul alone is arrested, but none of the other followers of Jesus.
- k. Like Jesus, Paul heard the mob crying out, *Away with him!*
- l. Like Jesus, the Roman officer handling Paul's case did not know his true identity.
- m. Like Jesus, Paul was associated with terrorists by Roman officials.
- n. In a way unique to most of us, Paul really did know *the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death* (Php_3:10).
- i. Paul's particular call and ministry make these similarities especially striking, but we are called to follow after Jesus also. We shouldn't be surprised when events in our lives are like events in Jesus' life. There may be a time of temptation in the wilderness, a time when people come to us with needs only God can meet, a time when we seem at the mercy of a storm, a time when we must cry out to God as in the Garden of Gethsemane, a time when we must simply lay down our lives, and trust God will gloriously raise us up. We, like Paul, are *predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son* (Rom_8:29).

6. However, Paul's experience was obviously different in many ways, not the least of which was the manner in which he will make his defense in the next chapter, while Jesus refused to defend Himself before His accusers.

(Act 21:2) We found⁹ a ship crossing over to Phoenicia,¹⁰ went aboard,¹¹ and put out to sea.¹²

(Act 21:3) After we sighted Cyprus¹³ and left it behind on our port side,¹⁴ we sailed on to Syria and put in¹⁵ at Tyre,¹⁶ because the ship was to unload its cargo there.

(Act 21:4) After we located¹⁷ the disciples, we stayed there¹⁸ seven days. They repeatedly told¹⁹ Paul through the Spirit²⁰ not to set foot²¹ in Jerusalem.²²

(Act 21:5) When²³ our time was over,²⁴ we left and went on our way. All of them, with their wives and children, accompanied²⁵ us outside of the city. After²⁶ kneeling down on the beach and praying,²⁷

(Act 21:6) we said farewell²⁸ to one another.²⁹ Then³⁰ we went aboard the ship, and they returned to their own homes.³¹

(Act 21:7) We continued the voyage from Tyre³² and arrived at Ptolemais,³³ and when we had greeted the brothers, we stayed with them for one day.

(Act 21:8) On the next day we left³⁴ and came to Caesarea,³⁵ and entered³⁶ the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven,³⁷ and stayed with him.

(Act 21:9) (He had four unmarried³⁸ daughters who prophesied.)³⁹

(Act 21:10) While we remained there for a number of days,⁴⁰ a prophet named Agabus⁴¹ came down from Judea.

(Act 21:11) He came⁴² to us, took⁴³ Paul's belt,⁴⁴ tied⁴⁵ his own hands and feet with it,⁴⁶ and said, "The Holy Spirit says this: 'This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will tie up the man whose belt this is, and will hand him over⁴⁷ to the Gentiles.' "

(Act 21:12) When we heard this, both we and the local people⁴⁸ begged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

(Act 21:13) Then Paul replied, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking⁴⁹ my heart? For I am ready not only to be tied up,⁵⁰ but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

(Act 21:14) Because he could not be persuaded,⁵¹ we said no more except,⁵² "The Lord's will be done."⁵³

(Act 21:15) After these days we got ready⁵⁴ and started up⁵⁵ to Jerusalem.

(Act 21:16) Some of the disciples from Caesarea⁵⁶ came along with us too, and brought us to the house⁵⁷ of Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple from the earliest times,⁵⁸ with whom we were to stay.

(Act 21:17) When we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers welcomed us gladly.⁵⁹

(Act 21:18) The next day Paul went in with us to see James, and all the elders were there.⁶⁰

(Act 21:19) When Paul⁶¹ had greeted them, he began to explain⁶² in detail⁶³ what God⁶⁴ had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

(Act 21:20) When they heard this, they praised⁶⁵ God. Then they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews⁶⁶ there are who have believed, and they are all ardent observers⁶⁷ of the law.⁶⁸

(Act 21:21) They have been informed about you — that you teach all the Jews now living⁶⁹ among the Gentiles to abandon⁷⁰ Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children⁷¹ or live⁷² according to our customs.

(Act 21:22) What then should we do? They will no doubt⁷³ hear that you have come.

(Act 21:23) So do what⁷⁴ we tell you: We have four men⁷⁵ who have taken⁷⁶ a vow;⁷⁷

(Act 21:24) take them and purify⁷⁸ yourself along with them and pay their expenses,⁷⁹ so that they may have their heads shaved.⁸⁰

Then⁸¹ everyone will know there is nothing in what they have been told⁸² about you, but that you yourself live in conformity with⁸³ the law.⁸⁴

(Act 21:25) But regarding the Gentiles who have believed, we have written a letter, having decided⁸⁵ that they should avoid⁸⁶ meat that has been sacrificed to idols⁸⁷ and blood and what has been strangled⁸⁸ and sexual immorality."

(Act 21:26) Then Paul took the men the next day,⁸⁹ and after he had purified himself⁹⁰ along with them, he went to the temple and gave notice⁹¹ of the completion of the days of purification,⁹² when⁹³ the sacrifice would be offered for each⁹⁴ of them.

(Act 21:27) When the seven days were almost over,⁹⁵ the Jews from the province of Asia⁹⁶ who had seen him in the temple area⁹⁷

stirred up the whole crowd⁹⁸ and seized⁹⁹ him,

(Act 21:28) shouting, "Men of Israel,¹⁰⁰ help! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people, our law,¹⁰¹ and this sanctuary!¹⁰² Furthermore¹⁰³ he has brought Greeks into the inner courts of the temple¹⁰⁴ and made this holy place ritually unclean!"¹⁰⁵

(Act 21:29) (For they had seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him previously, and¹⁰⁶ they assumed Paul had brought him into the inner temple courts.)¹⁰⁷

(Act 21:30) The whole city was stirred up,¹⁰⁸ and the people rushed together.¹⁰⁹ They seized¹¹⁰ Paul and dragged him out of the temple courts,¹¹¹ and immediately the doors were shut.

(Act 21:31) While they were trying¹¹² to kill him, a report¹¹³ was sent up¹¹⁴ to the commanding officer¹¹⁵ of the cohort¹¹⁶ that all Jerusalem was in confusion.¹¹⁷

(Act 21:32) He¹¹⁸ immediately took¹¹⁹ soldiers and centurions¹²⁰ and ran down to the crowd.¹²¹ When they saw¹²² the commanding officer¹²³ and the soldiers, they stopped beating¹²⁴ Paul.

(Act 21:33) Then the commanding officer¹²⁵ came up and arrested¹²⁶ him and ordered him to be tied up with two chains;¹²⁷ he¹²⁸

then asked who he was and what¹²⁹ he had done.

(Act 21:34) But some in the crowd shouted one thing, and others something else,¹³⁰ and when the commanding officer¹³¹ was unable¹³² to find out the truth¹³³ because of the disturbance,¹³⁴ he ordered Paul¹³⁵ to be brought into the barracks.¹³⁶

(Act 21:35) When he came to the steps, Paul¹³⁷ had to be carried¹³⁸ by the soldiers because of the violence¹³⁹ of the mob, (Act 21:36) for a crowd of people¹⁴⁰ followed them,¹⁴¹ screaming, "Away with him!"

(Act 21:37) As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks,¹⁴² he said¹⁴³ to the commanding officer,¹⁴⁴ "May I say¹⁴⁵ something to you?" The officer¹⁴⁶ replied,¹⁴⁷ "Do you know Greek?¹⁴⁸

(Act 21:38) Then you're not that Egyptian who started a rebellion¹⁴⁹ and led the four thousand men of the 'Assassins'¹⁵⁰ into the wilderness¹⁵¹ some time ago?"¹⁵²

(Act 21:39) Paul answered,¹⁵³ "I am a Jew¹⁵⁴ from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city.¹⁵⁵ Please¹⁵⁶ allow me to speak to the people."

(Act 21:40) When the commanding officer¹⁵⁷ had given him permission,¹⁵⁸ Paul stood¹⁵⁹ on the steps and gestured¹⁶⁰ to the people with his hand. When they had become silent,¹⁶¹ he addressed¹⁶² them in Aramaic,¹⁶³

(Act 22:1) ***Paul's Defense***

"Brothers and fathers, listen to my defense¹ that I now² make to you."

(Guzik)

Act 22:1-30

Acts 22 - PAUL'S JERUSALEM SERMON

A. The sermon to the mob in Jerusalem.

1. At the end of the previous chapter, Paul's audience for this sermon had just tried to kill him, thinking that he had profaned the temple by sneaking a Gentile in past the Court of the Gentiles.

a. However, once the crowd knew that Paul was in Roman protection, and once Paul began to address them in Hebrew (Aramaic), they became quiet and ready to listen (Act_21:40).

2. (Act_22:1-5) Paul tells of his Jewish upbringing and background.

"Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now." And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said: "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished."

a. **Brethren and fathers, hear:** Paul began his great defense before the Jews the same way Stephen did: *Men and brethren and fathers, listen.* (Act_7:2)

b. **I am indeed a Jew:** Paul is speaking as a Jew unto Jews; he is careful to lay the common ground between them.

c. **Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel:** Paul notes that though he was **born** outside of the Promised Land, he was **brought up** in Jerusalem, and **at the feet of Gamaliel**, one of the most prestigious rabbis of the day (Act_5:34).

i. Paul still served the God of his fathers; he had not rejected Judaism; Judaism had rejected God in Jesus Christ.

d. **Zealous toward God as you all are today:** Paul also reminds the crowd of his credentials as a persecutor of **this**

Way (an early manner of referring to Christianity), energetic enough to carry on his campaign of persecution beyond Judea, into Syria and the city of Damascus.

i. The message is clear: “I understand why you have attacked me. I was once an attacker also. I understand where

you are coming from.” Paul had been a Christian for more than twenty years, but could still relate to those who were not Christians.

3. (Act_22:6-11) Paul describes his supernatural experience on the way to Damascus.

“Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me.

And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’ And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.”

a. **Suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me:** Paul was a determined persecutor of Christians and Jesus until this heavenly light shone on him. It is as if Paul is saying: “I was just like you all, until I had an encounter with Jesus.

Jesus met me and my life was dramatically changed.”

b. **I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting:** Paul also came to understand he was persecuting Jesus Himself, the shining Lord of glory, brighter than the noonday sun.

c. And since I could not see for the glory of that light:

The brightness of that light made Paul blind. In persecuting Jesus he was spiritually blind, now he is also physically blind - and must humbly be **led by the hand** into the city of Damascus.

4. (Act_22:12-16) Paul describes his response to the supernatural experience in Damascus.

“Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*, came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’”

a. **Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews:** Paul notes that it was **Ananias**, a man with credentials as a good Jew who received him into the Christian family.

b. **The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will:** In Paul’s speech, we see that both he and Ananias are both simply acting like good Jews. They are not resisting God nor denying their heritage.

c. Act_22:14 is a wonderful capsule of the duty of every one before God: To **know His will**, to **see the Just One** (Jesus), and to **hear the voice of His mouth** (His word).

5. (Act_22:17-21) Paul describes his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion.

“Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.’ So I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of

Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’ Then He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.’”

a. **I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me:** Paul had an impressive vision of Jesus while in the temple; yet he never referred to this vision in his letters, and seems to only mention it now out of necessity. Paul’s Christian life was founded on God’s truth, not spiritual experiences, and he didn’t even like to talk a lot about his spiritual experiences.

b. **Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles:** When Paul was touched by God in Damascus, he was told then of his call to preach to the Gentiles (Act_9:15), so the words from Jesus to him in the temple at Jerusalem were not new. However, we can see that in his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, it would have been easy for Paul to care so much for the conversion of Israel that he would want to concentrate on that - that’s why Jesus gave him the reminder in the temple.

i. Paul made it clear that it wasn’t *his* idea to preach to the Gentiles; this was God’s plan, not his.

6. (Act_22:22-23) The crowd riots in response to Paul’s message.

And they listened to him until this word, and *then* they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a *fellow* from the earth, for he is not fit to live!” Then, as they cried out and tore off *their* clothes and threw dust into the air.

a. **And they listened to him until this word:** The mob that had tried to kill Paul, and had then listened intently to his whole sermon, erupted into rage over the utterance of **one word**. That **one word** was “**Gentiles**.” The Jewish mob was incensed that God’s salvation could be given freely to believing Gentiles.

i. Think of it: “**Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!**” over one word: **Gentiles**.

b. Paul had his audience all up until this point. In their minds, they didn't mind all this talk about Jesus, but they could not stand the idea that God might save Jews and Gentiles alike and in the same way.

c. These Jews of that day did not have a problem with Gentiles becoming Jews. But they were incredibly offended at the thought of Gentiles becoming Christians *just as* Jews became Christians, because it implied that Jews and Gentiles were equal, having to come to God on the same terms.

d. Likewise, many people today are offended that "good people" must be saved the same way "sinners" are; they want a gospel that will keep them separate from the "riffraff" of society.

i. In Acts 22, the Jewish mob expressed their hatred of others through violent rage; do we express our disdain of the perishing through indifference? We may not riot like the mob in this chapter did, but we may say by our inaction: "I won't give you the gospel; I don't really care if you perish in hell!"

B. Paul in Roman custody.

1. (Act_22:24) The commander demands an explanation of the riot.

The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him.

a. **The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks:** It must have been a strange sight for the Roman **commander**. He saw Paul passionately address this huge crowd in a language he didn't know. He saw the crowd in rapt attention, until suddenly, they erupted into a riot.

b. But when it was explained to him, he must have thought it absurd and offensive: All this rioting springing out of the hatred of Gentiles, people just like the commander himself.

c. **Examined under scourging:** It is suggested that Paul be beaten with a **scourge**. This was quite different from being beaten with a rod or a normal whip (which Paul had experienced, 2Co_11:24-25). Men often died or were crippled for life after a **scourging**.

d. To be **examined under scourging** may seem brutal, but was customary in that time - but only upon people who were not Roman citizens.

2. (Act_22:25-29) Paul reveals his Roman citizenship.

And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?" When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman." Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes." The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born *a citizen*." Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

a. **As they bound him with thongs:** Paul had his hands tied with leather straps so his hands joined around a wooden pole and his back was totally exposed. He was ready for a brutal beating, one that would not stop until he had confessed to the crimes he was suspected of - but at that moment he announces his Roman citizenship (**Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?**).

b. **Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman:** When this became known, the reaction was immediate. It was a grievous wrong to even *bind* a Roman citizen without due process, and they had *already* violated Paul's rights by binding him in Act_21:33. Therefore, **the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.**

c. **With a large sum I obtained this citizenship:**

Because of all the commotion and the beating Paul had received, he probably wasn't a very impressive spectacle. "Something of this sort may have been in the tribune's mind as he said, *It cost me a very large sum of money to obtain Roman citizenship* - the implication being that the privilege must have become cheap of late if such a sorry-looking figure as Paul could claim it." (Bruce)

i. Roman citizenship could not be bought for a fee, only for a bribe. Normally, only right or reward only granted it.

ii. "The point was not that the tribune doubted Paul's claim, but rather he was implying that anybody could become a citizen these days!" (Marshall)

iii. "The verbal claim to Roman citizenship was accepted at face value; penalties for falsifying documents and making false claims of citizenship were exceedingly stiff - Epictetus speaks of death for such acts." (Longenecker)

d. Paul reveals that he was **born a citizen**; his parents (or grandparents) must have been awarded the rights of citizenship for some good done on behalf of Rome.

i. "How the citizenship was acquired by Paul's father or grandfather we have no means of knowing, but analogy would suggest that it was for valuable services rendered to a Roman general or administrator in the southeastern area of Asia Minor." (Bruce)

ii. Paul was an extremely rare individual. It was uncommon to find such an educated, intelligent, devout Jew who was also a Roman citizen. God would use this unique background to use Paul in a special way, even as he wants to use *your* unique background to use you in a special way.

3. (Act_22:30) The Roman commander arranges a hearing of the charges against Paul before the Jewish council (the Sanhedrin).

The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds,

and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

a. **He wanted to know for certain why he was accused:**

All in all, this Roman commander seems to be a fair and upstanding man. Though he is not acquainted with the dispute between Paul and the Jews, he seems to desire a just resolution.

b. **And commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them:** So now, Paul will get what he believes is a dramatic second chance. The opportunity to preach to the mob on the temple mount ended in another riot, but he will get to speak before the Sanhedrin (**their council**) the next day.

i. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish “congress”; Paul would have the opportunity to speak before this same group that he was once a member of! Act_26:10 clearly says that Paul had a *vote* - usually, that would be used as a member of the Sanhedrin.

ii. So Paul now has the opportunity to speak before this distinguished group of men - and undoubtedly, he is assured in his heart that this is his opportunity of a lifetime, to preach to those he loves so much and knows so well - who knew how God might use it! Well, Paul didn't know!

iii. God had revealed a plan to Paul right at his conversion: *He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake* (Act_9:15-16). Paul knew the general plan; but just like us, he didn't know how it would all work out. He had to trust God, just like you and I have to do.

(Act 22:2) (When they heard³ that he was addressing⁴ them in Aramaic,⁵ they became even⁶ quieter.)⁷ Then⁸ Paul said, (Act 22:3) "I am a Jew,⁹ born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up¹⁰ in this city, educated with strictness¹¹ under¹²

Gamaliel¹³ according to the law of our ancestors,¹⁴ and was¹⁵ zealous¹⁶ for God just as all of you are today.

(Act 22:4) I¹⁷ persecuted this Way¹⁸ even to the point of death,¹⁹ tying up²⁰ both men and women and putting²¹ them in prison, (Act 22:5) as both the high priest and the whole council of elders²² can testify about me. From them²³ I also received²⁴ letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I was on my way²⁵ to make arrests there and bring²⁶ the prisoners²⁷ to Jerusalem²⁸ to be punished.

(Act 22:6) As²⁹ I was en route and near Damascus,³⁰ about noon a very bright³¹ light from heaven³² suddenly flashed³³ around me.

(Act 22:7) Then I³⁴ fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

(Act 22:8) I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.'

(Act 22:9) Those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand³⁵ the voice of the one who was speaking to me.

(Act 22:10) So I asked,³⁶ 'What should I do, Lord?' The Lord said to me, 'Get up³⁷ and go to Damascus; there you will be told about everything³⁸ that you have been designated³⁹ to do.'

(Act 22:11) Since I could not see because of⁴⁰ the brilliance⁴¹ of that light, I came to Damascus led by the hand of⁴² those who were with me.

(Act 22:12) A man named Ananias,⁴³ a devout man according to the law,⁴⁴ well spoken of by all the Jews who live there,⁴⁵

(Act 22:13) came⁴⁶ to me and stood beside me⁴⁷ and said to me, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight!'⁴⁸ And at that very moment⁴⁹ I looked up and saw him.⁵⁰

(Act 22:14) Then he said, 'The God of our ancestors⁵¹ has already chosen⁵² you to know his will, to see⁵³ the Righteous One,⁵⁴ and to hear a command⁵⁵ from his mouth, (Act 22:15) because you will be his witness⁵⁶ to all people⁵⁷ of what you have seen and heard.

(Act 22:16) And now what are you waiting for?⁵⁸ Get up,⁵⁹ be baptized, and have your sins washed away,⁶⁰ calling on his name.'⁶¹

(Act 22:17) When⁶² I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance⁶³

(Act 22:18) and saw the Lord⁶⁴ saying to me, 'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'

(Act 22:19) I replied,⁶⁵ 'Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat those in the various synagogues⁶⁶ who believed in you.

(Act 22:20) And when the blood of your witness⁶⁷ Stephen was shed,⁶⁸ I myself was standing nearby, approving,⁶⁹ and guarding the cloaks⁷⁰ of those who were killing him.'⁷¹

(Act 22:21) Then⁷² he said to me, 'Go, because I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' "

(Act 22:22) ***The Roman Commander Questions Paul***

The crowd⁷³ was listening to him until he said this.⁷⁴ Then⁷⁵ they raised their voices and shouted,⁷⁶ "Away with this man⁷⁷

from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live!"⁷⁸

(Act 22:23) While they were screaming⁷⁹ and throwing off their cloaks⁸⁰ and tossing dust⁸¹ in the air,

(Act 22:24) the commanding officer⁸² ordered Paul⁸³ to be brought back into the barracks.⁸⁴ He told them⁸⁵ to interrogate Paul⁸⁶ by beating him with a lash⁸⁷ so that he could find out the reason the crowd⁸⁸ was shouting at Paul⁸⁹ in this way.

(Act 22:25) When they had stretched him out for the lash,⁹⁰ Paul said to the centurion⁹¹ standing nearby, "Is it legal for you to lash a man who is a Roman citizen⁹² without a proper trial?"⁹³

(Act 22:26) When the centurion⁹⁴ heard this,⁹⁵ he went to the commanding officer⁹⁶ and reported it,⁹⁷ saying, "What are you about to do?⁹⁸ For this man is a Roman citizen."⁹⁹

(Act 22:27) So the commanding officer¹⁰⁰ came and asked¹⁰¹ Paul,¹⁰² "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"¹⁰³ He replied,¹⁰⁴ "Yes."

(Act 22:28) The commanding officer¹⁰⁵ answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money."¹⁰⁶ "But I was even¹⁰⁷ born a citizen,"¹⁰⁸ Paul replied.¹⁰⁹

(Act 22:29) Then those who were about to interrogate him stayed away¹¹⁰ from him, and the commanding officer¹¹¹ was frightened when he realized that Paul¹¹² was¹¹³ a Roman citizen¹¹⁴ and that he had had him tied up.¹¹⁵

(Act 22:30) ***Paul Before the Sanhedrin***

The next day, because the commanding officer¹¹⁶ wanted to know the true reason¹¹⁷ Paul¹¹⁸ was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and the whole council¹¹⁹ to assemble. He then brought¹²⁰ Paul down and had him stand before them.

(Act 23:1) Paul looked directly¹ at the council² and said, "Brothers, I have lived my life with a clear conscience³ before God to this day."

(Guzik)

Act 23:1-35

Acts 23 - PAUL IN PROTECTIVE CUSTODY, FROM JERUSALEM TO CAESAREA

A. Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin.

1. (Act 23:1-5) Paul rebukes the high priest.

Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, *you* whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?" And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" Then Paul said, "I did not

know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

a. **Paul, looking earnestly at the council:** Paul began his message before the Sanhedrin (what an opportunity for preaching!) in a way he probably thought to be innocent enough. He simply said, **"I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."**

i. Paul was not trying to say he was sinlessly perfect and that his conscience had never told him he was wrong.

Rather, he meant that he had responded to conscience when he had done wrong and had set things right.

ii. Nor would Paul ever consider a clear conscience a way to be justified before God. "Paul might well appeal to the testimony of conscience as he stood before the supreme court of Israel; it was on no righteousness of his own, however, that he relied for justification in the heavenly court. The purest conscience was an insecure basis of confidence under the scrutiny of God." (Bruce)

iii. Paul's statement in 1Co_4:4 is relevant: *For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.*

b. **And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth:** However, Paul's declaration he had **lived in all good conscience before God until this day** drew the wrath of the high priest.

He was offended that someone accused of such serious crimes could claim a clear conscience.

i. Or, perhaps, he was convicted in his heart by the inherent integrity of Paul's claim.

c. **God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!** How did Paul say these words in Act_23:3? It would have helped to hear Paul's tone of voice as he rebuked the high priest; was it an outburst of anger, or was it a calm, collected rebuke with that much more weight to it?

d. Whatever the tone, the rebuke was entirely accurate and justified.

i. The high priest indeed was a **whitewashed wall**; a white veneer of purity covering over obvious corruption.

ii. The high priest was also not only to be the administrator of the law, but the example of it. His command to have Paul struck was in fact contrary to both the spirit and the letter of the law. Deu_25:1-2 says only a man found guilty can be beaten, and Paul had been found guilty of nothing.

e. The **Ananias** who was high priest at this time was a man who did no honor to the office. He was well known for his greed; the ancient Jewish historian Josephus tells of how Ananias stole for himself the tithes that belonged to the common priests.

i. "He did not scruple to use violence and assassination to further his interests." (Bruce) Because of his pro-Roman politics, he was, however, brutally killed by Jewish nationalists.

ii. **God will strike you:** "Paul's words, however, were more prophetic than he realized. Ananias' final days - despite all his scheming and bribes - were lived as a hunted animal and ended at the hands of his own people." (Longenecker)

f. However, Paul agreed that it was wrong to **speak evil of the ruler of your people** (Exo_22:28), considering the office more than the man; but claims he **did not know** that Ananias was the high priest.

i. Some think he **did not know** because Paul's eyesight was bad. This is an inference from Gal_4:14-15; Gal_6:11, as well as from early written church traditions.

ii. Others think that Paul is being sarcastic here, with the idea "I didn't think that anyone who acted in such a manner *could* be the high priest!"

2. (Act_23:6-9) Paul divides the Sanhedrin.

But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!” And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection; and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, “We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.”

a. **Paul perceived:** Paul seems to have read his audience and saw they were not conducive to the gospel - the actions of the high priest and the attitudes of those present made this plain. So, Paul gives up on preaching the gospel, and does what he can to preserve his liberty before this council that wanted to lynch him.

b. **One part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees:** Paul’s course is now to divide the Sanhedrin among their party lines - to get one side (the **Pharisees**) sympathetic to him, instead of having them united against him.

i. **Sadducees** were the “religious liberals” of their day, and denied the reality of life after death and the concept of resurrection. Luke rightly says of them, **Sadducees say that there is no resurrection; and no angel or spirit.**

ii. The **Pharisees** were more likely to find some ground of agreement with Paul, being the “fundamentalists” of their day. They took the Bible seriously, even if they did err greatly by *adding* the traditions of men to what they received in the Bible.

iii. Usually the **Saducees** and the **Pharisees** were bitter enemies, but they were able to unite in opposition against Jesus (Mat_16:1, Joh_11:47-53) and Paul. It’s strange how people with nothing in common will come together as friends to oppose God or His work.

c. **I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee:** Knowing his audience, Paul refers to his heritage as a Pharisee, and declares, **“concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged.”** He knew this was a “hot issue” between the two parties.

i. Of course, this was an essentially true claim. The center of Paul’s gospel was a resurrected Jesus.

d. **When he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided:** Paul picked the right issue. Framed in these terms, he immediately gained the Pharisees as an ally, and he let *them* argue it out with the Sadducees.

i. The Pharisees, in saying **“let us not fight against God”** are returning to the previous attitude that their great leader Gamaliel advised in Act_5:38-39.

e. Paul has saved his skin; but he certainly cannot be happy. He had the opportunity to preach to a huge crowd of attentive Jews on the temple mount, and now an opportunity to preach to the Sanhedrin - and both opportunities blew up in his face.

3. (Act_23:10-11) After Paul is rescued by the Roman commander, he is comforted that night by Jesus.

Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring *him* into the barracks. But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”

a. **Now when there arose a great dissension:** The commander must now be certain that these Jews are crazy in their endless and violent disputes. Previously, they rioted over the one word “*Gentiles*,” now it is over the one word “*resurrection*.”

b. **The commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go**

down and take him by force from among them: The commander removed Paul for his own safety, and left him in custody in the barracks.

c. What a dark place Paul must have been in, sitting alone in the barracks! Two once-in-a-lifetime opportunities blew up in his face, and it would not be surprising if Paul blamed himself for the missed opportunity before the Sanhedrin. After all, wasn't it his reaction to the punch from the High Priest that spoiled everything?

i. It wouldn't be surprising if Paul sat alone in the barracks that night, with his head in his hands and tears streaming down his face, mourning the lost opportunities for God and how he might have spoiled them. Paul probably wondered if God would ever, ever want to use him again, or if this was the end.

ii. "Bold, courageous, fearless during the day, the night of loneliness finds the strength spent, and the enemy is never slow to take advantage of that fact." (Morgan)

iii. It was in the darkness of that night when the fears came upon Paul; when his trust in God seemed to falter; when he worried about what God was going to do and if he was going to make it. It was in the darkness of that night that Jesus came to Paul and **stood by him**.

d. But, in a marvelous way, **the Lord stood by him**. Jesus' physical presence (as it seems was the case) with Paul was a unique manifestation. But Jesus promised every believer to always be with them (Mat_28:20).

i. Jesus knew where Paul was; He had not lost sight of Paul because he was in jail. When John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, was in jail, a man visited him and said, "Friend, the Lord sent me to you, and I have been looking in half the prisons in England for you." John Bunyan replied, "I don't think the Lord sent you to me, because if He had, you would have come here first. God knows I have been here for years." God knows where you

are today; even if you are hiding it from everyone else, God knows where you are.

ii. Paul was alone, but he wasn't alone; if everyone else forsook him, Jesus was enough. Better to be in jail with the Lord than to be in heaven without him.

iii. Paul had been miraculously delivered from jail cells before; but this time, the Lord met him right in the jail cell.

We often demand that Jesus deliver us *out* of our circumstances, when He wants to meet us right *in* them. We sometimes think we are surrendering to Jesus when we are really only demanding an escape. God wants to meet you *in* whatever you are facing now.

e. **Be of good cheer, Paul:** Jesus was not only with Paul; He gave him words of comfort. The words **be of good cheer** tell us that the night brought with it an emotional and perhaps spiritual darkness upon Paul. Jesus was there to cheer His faithful servant after he had spent himself for Jesus' sake.

i. Jesus would not have said **be of good cheer** unless Paul needed to hear those words. Paul knew his situation was bad, but he didn't know the half of it! The next day, forty Jewish assassins would gather together and vow to go on a hunger strike until they murdered Paul. Paul didn't know this would happen, but Jesus did! Yet He can still say to Paul, **be of good cheer**.

ii. You might think that things are bad right now, but you may not even know the half of it! But Jesus knows, and he still says to you, **be of good cheer**. Why? Not because everything is fine; but because God is still on His throne, and He still holds to His promise that *all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose* (Rom_8:28).

iii. Anyone can **be of good cheer** when everything is great; but the Christian can **be of good cheer** when everything is rotten, because he knows that he has a great God.

f. **For as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome:** Jesus remembered what Paul *had* done in Jerusalem, and told Paul that there *remained more* work for him to do in Rome.

i. Paul could have been discouraged about the lack of results from the sermon in Jerusalem. But the results were not his responsibility. His responsibility was to bring the Word of God and to testify of Jesus; the results were God's responsibility. **You have testified for Me in Jerusalem** means that Jesus complimented Paul on a job well done!

ii. Yet, though Paul had done a good job, there was more to do. **So you must also bear witness at Rome** was Paul's next assignment. The greatest words a faithful child of God can hear are "there is more for you to do." Those words grieve a lazy servant, but bring joy to a faithful servant.

iii. Dear child of God, there is more for you to do! More people to bring to Christ, more ways for you to glorify Him, more people to pray with, more humble ways to serve His people, more hungry to feed, more naked to clothe, more weary saints for you to encourage!

iv. "A divine decree ordains for you greater and more trying service than as yet you have seen. A future awaits you, and no power on the earth or under the earth can rob you of it; therefore be of good cheer." (Spurgeon)

g. **So you must also bear witness at Rome:** The promise of more work to do was also a promise of continued protection. Paul could not perish until he had finished the course God had appointed for him. Rome waited!

i. Paul really *wanted* to go on to Rome (Act_19:21, Rom_1:9-12). Sometimes we think that just because we *want* something a lot, it couldn't be God's will for us. But God often gives us the desires of our hearts (Psa_37:4).

ii. The *timing* of this promise was especially precious. It didn't look like Paul would get out of Jerusalem alive, much

less make it to Rome. God not only knows what we need to hear; He knows *when* we need to hear it.

iii. Paul faced his enemies the next day with a smile, knowing that they were powerless against him, *because God had more for him to do!*

iv. “This assurance meant much to Paul during the delays and anxieties of the next two years, and goes far to account for the calm and dignified bearing which from now on marks him out as a master of events rather than their victim.” (Bruce)

B. Paul is delivered from the plot of assassins.

1. (Act_23:12-15) Forty men vow to set an ambush and kill Paul.

And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, “We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near.”

a. **Saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul:** These men lack nothing in *zeal*. But their zeal is *not according to knowledge* (Rom_10:2). Zeal and devotion by themselves prove *nothing* about an individual’s right relationship with God.

b. **Suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him:** However, in their zeal, they think nothing of lying to the Roman commander to carry out their plot. They will readily disobey God to follow their zealous plot.

c. Would neither eat nor drink till they had killed

Paul: Did these men who made the vow of fasting die, because they failed in their mission to kill Paul? Probably not. Ancient rabbis allowed for four types of vows to be broken: “vows of incitement, vows of exaggeration, vows made in error, and vows that cannot be fulfilled by reason of constraint” -

exclusions allowing for almost any contingency. (Longenecker)

2. (Act_23:16-22) Paul’s nephew learns of the plot and warns the Roman commander.

So when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, “Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him.” So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, “Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you.” Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside and asked privately, “What is it that you have to tell me?” And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you.” So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded *him*, “Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me.”

a. In these unusual circumstances, we see God’s protecting hand all over Paul. God knows how to take care of His servant!

3. (Act_23:23-33) Paul escapes to Caesarea, with a full military escort and a letter referring his case to the provincial governor.

And he called for two centurions, saying, “Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring *him* safely to Felix the governor.” He wrote a letter in the following manner: Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings. This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell.

Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought *him* by night to Antipatris. The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.

a. **Prepare two hundred soldiers:** Again, we are impressed with the wise action and fairness of the Roman commander, whose name was **Cladius Lysias**, as we learn from his letter.

i. Remember that Acts was likely written as a defense brief or a “friend-of-the-court” document for Paul before his case was heard by Caesar Nero in Rome. It should not surprise us that Luke emphasizes those events that cast Roman officials in a positive light!

b. **I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman:** In his letter, Claudius implies that he learned of Paul’s Roman citizenship right away, and he says nothing of the way Paul was bound twice and almost scourged for the same of interrogation.

c. The assessment that Paul **had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains** was important for Luke to record. Since Roman officials trying Paul's case were going to read this document, they needed to know that other Roman officials had judged Paul "not guilty."

i. "One of Luke's prime motives in writing his twofold history is to demonstrate that there is no substance in this charge of subversion brought not only against Paul but against Christians in general - that competent and impartial judges had repeatedly confirmed the innocence of the Christian movement and the Christian missionaries in respect of Roman law." (Bruce)

d. **Took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris:** Why did the 200 soldiers go this far, and not all the way to Caesarea? Because the most dangerous part of the road was only up **to Antipatris**. "Up to Antipatris [about 25 miles] the country was dangerous and inhabited by Jews; after that the country was open and flat, quite unsuited for any ambush and largely inhabited by Gentiles." (Barclay)

4. (Act_23:34-35) Paul awaits trial in Caesarea.

And when the governor had read *it*, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that *he was* from Cilicia, he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

a. **And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium:** As Paul awaited trial in Caesarea, how do you think his heart stood? Afraid? Stressed? Discouraged? No doubt, he probably trusted in God, because he had received the Lord's words of encouragement and His promise that lonely night in Jerusalem. Have you received the Lord's words of encouragement and promise to you? Are they making a difference?

(Act 23:2) At that⁴ the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near⁵ Paul⁶ to strike⁷ him on the mouth.

(Act 23:3) Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!⁸ Do⁹ you sit there judging me according to the law,¹⁰ and in violation of the law¹¹ you order me to be struck?"

(Act 23:4) Those standing near him¹² said, "Do you dare insult¹³ God's high priest?"

(Act 23:5) Paul replied,¹⁴ "I did not realize,¹⁵ brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ' ***You must not speak evil about a ruler of your people.***' "¹⁶

(Act 23:6) Then when Paul noticed¹⁷ that part of them were Sadducees¹⁸ and the others Pharisees,¹⁹ he shouted out in the council,²⁰

"Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection²¹ of the dead!"

(Act 23:7) When he said this,²² an argument²³ began²⁴ between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

(Act 23:8) (For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)²⁵

(Act 23:9) There was a great commotion,²⁶ and some experts in the law²⁷ from the party of the Pharisees stood up²⁸ and protested strongly,²⁹ "We find nothing wrong³⁰ with this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

(Act 23:10) When the argument became³¹ so great the commanding officer³² feared that they would tear Paul to pieces,³³ he ordered the detachment³⁴ to go down, take him away from them by force,³⁵ and bring him into the barracks.³⁶

(Act 23:11) The following night the Lord³⁷ stood near³⁸ Paul³⁹ and said, "Have courage,⁴⁰ for just as you have testified about me in Jerusalem,⁴¹ so you must also testify in Rome."⁴²

(Act 23:12) ***The Plot to Kill Paul***

When morning came,⁴³ the Jews formed⁴⁴ a conspiracy⁴⁵ and bound themselves with an oath⁴⁶ not to eat or drink anything⁴⁷

until they had killed Paul.

(Act 23:13) There were more than forty of them who formed this conspiracy.⁴⁸

(Act 23:14) They⁴⁹ went⁵⁰ to the chief priests⁵¹ and the elders and said, "We have bound ourselves with a solemn oath⁵² not to partake⁵³ of anything until we have killed Paul.

(Act 23:15) So now you and the council⁵⁴ request the commanding officer⁵⁵ to bring him down to you, as if you were going to determine⁵⁶ his case⁵⁷ by conducting a more thorough inquiry.⁵⁸ We are ready to kill him⁵⁹ before he comes near this place."⁶⁰

(Act 23:16) But when the son of Paul's sister heard about the ambush,⁶¹ he came and entered⁶² the barracks⁶³ and told Paul.

(Act 23:17) Paul called⁶⁴ one of the centurions⁶⁵ and said, "Take this young man to the commanding officer,⁶⁶ for he has something to report to him."

(Act 23:18) So the centurion⁶⁷ took him and brought him to the commanding officer⁶⁸ and said, "The prisoner Paul called⁶⁹ me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you."

(Act 23:19) The commanding officer⁷⁰ took him by the hand, withdrew privately, and asked, "What is it that you want⁷¹ to report to me?"

(Act 23:20) He replied,⁷² "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council⁷³ tomorrow, as if they were going to inquire more thoroughly about him.

(Act 23:21) So do not let them persuade you to do this,⁷⁴ because more than forty of them⁷⁵ are lying in ambush⁷⁶ for him. They⁷⁷ have bound themselves with an oath⁷⁸ not to eat or drink anything⁷⁹ until they have killed him, and

now they are ready, waiting for you to agree to their request."⁸⁰

(Act 23:22) Then the commanding officer⁸¹ sent the young man away, directing him,⁸² "Tell no one that you have reported⁸³ these things to me."

(Act 23:23) Then⁸⁴ he summoned⁸⁵ two of the centurions⁸⁶ and said, "Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea⁸⁷ along with seventy horsemen⁸⁸ and two hundred spearmen⁸⁹ by⁹⁰ nine o'clock tonight,⁹¹

(Act 23:24) and provide mounts for Paul to ride⁹² so that he may be brought safely to Felix⁹³ the governor."⁹⁴

(Act 23:25) He wrote⁹⁵ a letter that went like this:⁹⁶

(Act 23:26) Claudius Lysias to His Excellency Governor⁹⁷ Felix,⁹⁸ greetings.

(Act 23:27) This man was seized⁹⁹ by the Jews and they were about to kill him,¹⁰⁰ when I came up¹⁰¹ with the detachment¹⁰² and rescued him, because I had learned that he was¹⁰³ a Roman citizen.¹⁰⁴

(Act 23:28) Since I wanted to know¹⁰⁵ what charge they were accusing him of,¹⁰⁶ I brought him down to their council.¹⁰⁷

(Act 23:29) I found he¹⁰⁸ was accused with reference to controversial questions¹⁰⁹ about their law, but no charge against him deserved death or imprisonment.¹¹⁰

(Act 23:30) When I was informed¹¹¹ there would be a plot¹¹² against this man, I sent him to you at once, also ordering his accusers to state their charges¹¹³ against him before you.

(Act 23:31) So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders,¹¹⁴ took¹¹⁵ Paul and brought him to Antipatris¹¹⁶ during the night.

(Act 23:32) The next day they let¹¹⁷ the horsemen¹¹⁸ go on with him, and they returned to the barracks.¹¹⁹

(Act 23:33) When the horsemen¹²⁰ came to Caesarea¹²¹ and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented¹²² Paul to him.

(Act 23:34) When the governor¹²³ had read¹²⁴ the letter,¹²⁵ he asked¹²⁶ what province he was from.¹²⁷ When he learned¹²⁸ that he was from Cilicia,¹²⁹

(Act 23:35) he said, "I will give you a hearing¹³⁰ when your accusers arrive too." Then¹³¹ he ordered that Paul¹³² be kept under guard in Herod's palace.¹³³

(Act 24:1) ***The Accusations Against Paul***

After five days the high priest Ananias¹ came down with some elders and an attorney² named³ Tertullus, and they⁴ brought formal charges⁵ against Paul to the governor.

(Guzik)

Act 24:1-27

Acts 24 - PAUL'S TRIAL BEFORE FELIX

A. The accusations against Paul.

1. (Act_24:1) The Jews assemble their case against Paul.

Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator *named* Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.

a. The Jewish leadership (**Ananias the high priest** and the **elders**) bring a man named **Tertullus** - a skilled lawyer to present their case.

b. The presence of all three (**Ananias**, the **elders**, and a "top gun" lawyer) at the court of Felix reminds us of how serious the Jewish leadership was about obtaining a conviction against Paul.

2. (Act_24:2-4) Tertullus introduces his accusation against Paul with flattery towards Felix.

And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: "Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we accept *it* always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us."

a. **Most excellent Felix:** Felix began life as a slave. His brother Pallas was a friend of the emperor Claudius; through such influence, he rose in status as a free man became the first slave in history to become a governor of a Roman province.

But his slave mentality stayed with him; Tacitus, the Roman historian, describes Felix as “a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave” (*Historiae* 5.9, cited in Longnecker).

i. “The picture drawn by Tacitus of Felix’s public and private life is not a pretty one. Trading on the influences of his infamous brother [Pallas, a favorite of the emperor Claudius], he indulged in every license and excess, thinking ‘that he could do any evil act with impunity’ (Tacitus, *Annals* 12.54).” (Williams)

b. **Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight:** This was plain, lying flattery. “In reality he [Felix] had put down several insurrections with such barbarous brutality that he earned for himself the horror, not the thanks, of the Jewish population.” (Stott) c. How aware are we of the danger of flattery?

i. Rom_16:18 speaks to us of who *do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple*. Jud_1:16 speaks of those who *mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage*.

ii. Four different times, the book of Proverbs connects flattery with the sin of sexual immorality. How many people have been seduced into immorality through simple flattery?

iii. Pro_20:19 says, *He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; there for do not associate with one who flatters with his lips*. We aren’t to make flatterers our close friends!

iv. Psa_78:36 says we can even flatter God: *Nevertheless they flattered Him with their mouth, and they lied to Him*

with their tongue. When you give God insincere praise, it is flattery, and God doesn't want it.

3. (Act_24:5-6) Paul's accusers state their specific charges.

"For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law."

a. The charges against Paul were essentially that he was politically dangerous (**a plague . . . a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes**) and that he had profaned the temple.

i. Ancient Judea was filled with would-be messiahs and revolutionaries against Rome. Tertullus tries to put Paul in the same bag with these kinds of terrorists.

b. The reference to Paul being **a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes** is intended as a disparaging reference to both Jesus and His followers. *Nazareth* had a poor reputation as a city (Joh_1:46).

c. **Among all Jews throughout the world:** Here, Tertullus gives an unintended compliment as he describes the extent of Paul's ministry.

d. The only really specific charge against Paul is that he **tried to profane the temple**; but no *evidence* is given of the charge because none existed. This was a fabricated charge based on rumor only. (Act_21:26-29) i. Obviously, Paul has nothing to fear from the truth; but he knew that the truth does not always win out in a court of law!

ii. Significantly, the same man who found it so easy to flatter finds it also easy to accuse with no evidence. The two almost always go together; the person who today flatters you will likely tomorrow accuse you behind your back.

4. (Act_24:7-9) Tertullus concludes his accusation against Paul.

"But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took *him* out of our hands, commanding his accusers to

come to you.

By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.” And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

a. The Roman commander **Lysias**, who rescued Paul, is put into a bad light. Clearly, the Jews regret that the case has come this far, having preferred to settle it with mob justice.

b. **By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him:** Tertullus doesn’t even pretend to offer outside evidence of the charges. His only hope is that Paul will incriminate himself under examination by Felix.

i. “His oration has been blamed as *weak, lame, and imperfect*; and yet, perhaps, few, with so *bad a cause*, could have made *better* of it.” (Clarke) c. **The Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so:** The other Jewish accusers present (the high priest and the elders) agree with the charges, but offer no supporting *evidence*.

B. Paul’s defense.

1. (Act_24:10-13) Paul exposes the weakness of the case against him.

Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: “Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.”

a. **I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:** Paul is happy to answer for himself, knowing that the facts of the case are in his favor - and notably, Paul uses no flattery in his address to Felix!

b. **Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me:** Even though it has been **no more than twelve days**, and many witnesses should be easily found, Paul's accusers provide no witnesses to demonstrate that he was in fact **in the temple disputing or inciting the crowd**. There is simply no proof for their accusations.

2. (Act_24:14-21) Paul explains his ministry, and why he was arrested.

"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust. This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. Or else let those who are *here* themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, unless *it is* for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.'"

a. Paul makes it clear that he has not abandoned the **God of my fathers** or the **Law and the Prophets**; instead he is acting in fulfillment of them both.

b. The basis of Paul's belief is founded on something accepted by a large segment of devout Jews: **The resurrection of the dead** (specifically, the resurrection of Jesus).

i. **Both of the just and the unjust:** Paul clearly believed in a resurrection for both the righteous and the unrighteous. The idea of soul-sleep or annihilation for the unrighteous is not accurate according to New Testament teaching.

c. **I came to bring alms and offerings** refers to the collection Paul made for Judean Christians among the Gentile churches of the West (Gal_2:10; Rom_15:26; 2 Corinthians 8-9).

d. **They ought to have been here before you to object:** In this, Paul reminds Felix that there is no eyewitness *testimony* to prove the charges of Paul's accusers.

i. "This was a strong point in his defense: the people who had raised the hue and cry in the first instance, claiming to be eyewitnesses of his alleged sacrilege, had not troubled to be present." (Bruce) Because Paul is in the right, he consistently calls the case back to the *evidence*, the very thing his accusers avoided.

ii. Christians should never be timid about or ashamed of the truth, or of the evidence. If we are truly following God, the truth and evidence are our friends, not our accusers.

C. Felix's decision in the case.

1. (Act_24:22-23) Felix avoids making a legal decision.

But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of *the Way*, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case." So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let *him* have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.

a. **When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case:** Felix avoided a decision under the pretense of waiting for more evidence through the Roman commander Lysias. But Felix clearly *had* enough evidence to make a decision in Paul's favor (**having more accurate knowledge of the Way**).

b. **Let him have liberty:** Yet, knowing Paul's innocence, he grants Paul generous liberty even while he is held in custody.

c. Felix tried to walk a middle ground. He knew Paul was innocent, yet he did not want to identify himself with Paul's

gospel and the Christians. So he made no decision and kept Paul in custody.

2. (Act_24:24-25) Felix avoids making a spiritual decision.

And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

a. **Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ:** Felix wanted his wife to hear Paul's testimony, either as a curiosity or so that she could advise him. After all, he claimed to have insufficient evidence for a decision.

b. **Drusilla** was a sister to Herod Agrippa II and Bernice mentioned in Acts 25. Drusilla was reported to be of great beauty, and Felix seduced her away from her husband, enticing her to become his third wife.

i. "The lax morals of Felix and Drusilla help to explain the topics on which Paul spoke to them." (Stott)

c. **He reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come:** We can surmise that Paul spoke to Felix and Drusilla about the **righteousness** that is our in Jesus Christ; about the need for Christian ethics (**self-control**) and about our eternal accountability before God (**the judgment to come**).

i. We admire Paul's bold preaching, directed right to the issues of Felix's life: "Are there not some to be found, who think the highest object of the minister is to attract the multitude and then to please them? O my God! how solemnly ought each of us to bewail our sin, if we feel we have been guilty in this matter. What is it to have pleased men? Is there aught in it that can make our head lie easy on the pillow of our death? Is there aught in it that can give us boldness in the day of judgment when we face thy tribunal, O Judge of quick and dead? No, my brethren,

we must always take our texts so that we may bear upon our hearers with all our might.” (Spurgeon)

ii. “But some men will say, ‘Sir, ministers ought not to be personal.’ Ministers ought to be personal, and they will never be true to their Master till they are . . . But now we poor craven sons of nobodies have to stand and talk about generalities; but we are afraid to point you out and tell you of your sins personally. But, blessed be God, from that fear I have been delivered long ago. There walketh not a man on the surface of this earth whom I dare not reprove.”

(Spurgeon)

d. **Felix was afraid**: Hearing the gospel made Felix **afraid**; knowing his life, at least we can say that he probably understood it! The gospel should make those who are intent on rejecting Jesus **afraid**.

e. **Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you**: However, Felix was unwilling to *declare* his decision *against* Jesus. Instead, he rejected Jesus under the pretense of *delaying* his decision.

i. Many respond to the gospel in this way; they express their rejection through delay, by procrastinating their decision to commit to Jesus Christ - but it is rejection none the less.

ii. This is why the Bible states *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation* (2Co_6:2).

iii. How foolish to trust in **a convenient time**! Are you waiting for **a convenient time** to follow God? “Thou sayest, ‘Another time.’ How knowest thou that thou wilt ever feel again as thou feelest now? This morning, perhaps a voice is saying in thy heart, ‘Prepare to meet thy God.’ Tomorrow that voice will be hushed. The gaieties of the ball-room and the theatre will put out that voice that warns thee now, and perhaps thou wilt never hear it again. Men all have their warnings, and all men who perish have had a *last warning*. Perhaps this is your last warning.”

(Spurgeon)

iv. "God to-day is pulling the reins tight to check you from your lust; perhaps, if to-day you spurn the bit, and rush madly on, he will throw the reins upon your back, saying, 'Let him alone;' and then it is a dark steeple-chase between hell and earth, and you will run it in mad confusion, never thinking of a hell till you find yourself past warning, past repentance, past faith, past hope." (Spurgeon)

f. The claims of Jesus are never convenient for us; if we insist on waiting for **a convenient time**, we will wait for an eternity - in the judgment of hell.

3. (Act_24:26-27) The evil motive of Felix's heart is revealed: greed.

Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

a. **He also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him:** Though Felix met often with Paul, it was not honest inquiry. He hoped to be paid off with a bribe.

b. **After two years:** Under Roman law, the type of custody Paul was in was could only last two years. Felix showed a blatant disregard for this by keeping Paul for such an extended period.

c. **Felix . . . left Paul bound:** Felix refused to release Paul, knowing his innocence, for the same reason Pilate condemned Jesus while knowing His innocence. They both acted out of pure political expediency (**wanting to do the Jews a favor**).

i. In a way, people like Felix and Pilate are the most guilty of those who reject Jesus Christ. They *know* what is right but refuse to do right purely out of the *fear of man*. They have an eternally fatal lack of courage.

(Act 24:2) When Paul⁶ had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him,⁷ saying, "We have experienced a lengthy

time⁸ of peace through your rule,⁹ and reforms¹⁰ are being made in this nation¹¹ through your foresight.¹²

(Act 24:3) Most excellent Felix,¹³ we acknowledge this everywhere and in every way¹⁴ with all gratitude.¹⁵

(Act 24:4) But so that I may not delay¹⁶ you any further, I beg¹⁷ you to hear us briefly¹⁸ with your customary graciousness.¹⁹

(Act 24:5) For we have found²⁰ this man to be a troublemaker,²¹ one who stirs up riots²² among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader²³ of the sect of the Nazarenes.²⁴

(Act 24:6) He²⁵ even tried to desecrate²⁶ the temple, so we arrested²⁷ him.²⁸

(Act 24:7) *(TEXT OMITTED)*

(Act 24:8) When you examine²⁹ him yourself, you will be able to learn from him³⁰ about all these things we are accusing him of doing."³¹

(Act 24:9) The Jews also joined in the verbal attack,³² claiming³³ that these things were true.

(Act 24:10) ***Paul's Defense Before Felix***

When the governor gestured for him to speak, Paul replied, "Because I know³⁴ that you have been a judge over this nation for many years, I confidently make my defense.³⁵

(Act 24:11) As you can verify³⁶ for yourself, not more than twelve days ago³⁷ I went up to Jerusalem³⁸ to worship.

(Act 24:12) They did not find me arguing³⁹ with anyone or stirring up a crowd⁴⁰ in the temple courts⁴¹ or in the synagogues⁴² or throughout the city,⁴³

(Act 24:13) nor can they prove⁴⁴ to you the things⁴⁵ they are accusing me of doing.⁴⁶

(Act 24:14) But I confess this to you, that I worship⁴⁷ the God of our ancestors⁴⁸ according to the Way (which they call a sect), believing everything that is according to the law⁴⁹ and that is written in the prophets.

(Act 24:15) I have⁵⁰ a hope in God (a hope⁵¹ that⁵² these men⁵³ themselves accept too) that there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.⁵⁴

(Act 24:16) This is the reason⁵⁵ I do my best to always⁵⁶ have a clear⁵⁷ conscience toward God and toward people.⁵⁸

(Act 24:17) After several years⁵⁹ I came to bring to my people gifts for the poor⁶⁰ and to present offerings,⁶¹

(Act 24:18) which I was doing when they found me in the temple, ritually purified,⁶² without a crowd or a disturbance.⁶³

(Act 24:19) But there are some Jews from the province of Asia⁶⁴ who should be here before you and bring charges,⁶⁵ if they have anything against me.

(Act 24:20) Or these men here⁶⁶ should tell what crime⁶⁷ they found me guilty of⁶⁸ when I stood before the council,⁶⁹

(Act 24:21) other than⁷⁰ this one thing⁷¹ I shouted out while I stood before⁷² them: 'I am on trial before you today concerning the resurrection of the dead.' "⁷³

(Act 24:22) Then Felix,⁷⁴ who understood the facts⁷⁵ concerning the Way⁷⁶ more accurately,⁷⁷ adjourned their hearing,⁷⁸ saying, "When Lysias the commanding officer comes down, I will decide your case."⁷⁹

(Act 24:23) He ordered the centurion⁸⁰ to guard Paul,⁸¹ but to let him have some freedom,⁸² and not to prevent any of his friends⁸³

from meeting his needs.⁸⁴

(Act 24:24) ***Paul Speaks Repeatedly to Felix***

Some days later, when Felix⁸⁵ arrived with his wife Drusilla,⁸⁶ who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him speak⁸⁷ about faith in Christ Jesus.⁸⁸

(Act 24:25) While Paul⁸⁹ was discussing⁹⁰ righteousness, self-control,⁹¹ and the coming judgment, Felix⁹² became⁹³

frightened and said, "Go away for now, and when I have an opportunity,⁹⁴ I will send for you."

(Act 24:26) At the same time he was also hoping that Paul would give him money,⁹⁵ and for this reason he sent for Paul⁹⁶ as often as possible⁹⁷ and talked⁹⁸ with him.

(Act 24:27) After two years⁹⁹ had passed, Porcius Festus¹⁰⁰ succeeded Felix,¹⁰¹ and because he wanted to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.¹⁰²

(Act 25:1) ***Paul Appeals to Caesar***

Now¹ three days after Festus² arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem³ from Caesarea.⁴

(Guzik)

Act 25:1-27

Acts 25 - PAUL'S TRIAL BEFORE FESTUS

A. Paul appeals to Caesar to avoid a plot against his life.

1. (Act_25:1-3) When Felix is replaced, Paul's Jewish accusers decide to re-try the case against Paul.

Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem; while *they* lay in ambush along the road to kill him.

a. **Now when Festus had come to the province:** Felix was undoubtedly a bad man, but history tells us Festus was a basically good man. Festus governed well, despite all the problems left him by Felix.

b. **That he would summon him to Jerusalem; while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him:** The Jewish leaders wanted Festus to call Paul to Jerusalem for the trial, so that they could murder him in an ambush along the way.

c. We can see that Paul's generous "imprisonment" in Caesarea was actually a providential provision of protective custody against the murderous intentions of the Jews, as

well as a “forced rest” in light of his unfailing missionary service in years past, and great tasks in the years ahead.

2. (Act_25:4-8) Festus re-opens the trial in Caesarea.

But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going *there* shortly. “Therefore,” he said, “let those who have authority among you go down with *me* and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him.” And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought. When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, while he answered for himself, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.”

a. **Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea:** We don’t know if Festus knew the intentions of the Jewish leaders or not. Either way, he refused to grant their request for a change of venue.

b. The outcome of this trial was the same. The Jews offered many accusations **which they could not prove**, and Paul confidently rested on both the evidence of the case and his apparent integrity.

3. (Act_25:9-12) Paul appeals his case to Caesar.

But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?” So Paul said, “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.” Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, “You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!”

a. **Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?** Festus, probably ignorant of the plot of the Jews, suggests moving the trial back to Jerusalem, where Paul would surely be murdered on the journey.

b. **So Paul said, “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged . . . I appeal to Caesar.”**

Paul, seeing through this plot (either through supernatural knowledge or God-given common sense and deduction) demands to stand trial before Caesar.

i. Paul didn’t want to go to Jerusalem. He wasn’t afraid to face the lions, but he didn’t want to put his head in a lion’s mouth if he could avoid it.

c. **I appeal to Caesar:** It was the right of every Roman citizen to have his case heard by Caesar himself, after initial trials and appeals had failed to reach a satisfactory decision. This was in effect an appeal to the “supreme court” of the empire.

i. Paul was appealing specifically to Caesar Nero, who was later an avowed enemy of Christians. But the first five years of his reign, when he was under the influence of good men around him, Nero was regarded as a wise and just ruler. Paul had no reason at this time to believe that Nero would be anti-Christian.

d. But remember Paul’s thinking in making this appeal: he is convinced that the evidence is on his side, and because he senses that perhaps his current judge is sympathetic to his accusers.

B. Paul’s hearing before King Agrippa.

1. (Act_25:13-22) Festus explains the case involving Paul to the visiting King Agrippa.

And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying: “There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed *me*, when I

was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.' Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in. When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar." Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him."

a. **Festus laid Paul's case before the king:** Festus, new to his post and perhaps unfamiliar with Jewish traditions and customs, seems somewhat confused by Paul's case. Therefore, even though there was not enough evidence to convict Paul, the investigation continues.

b. The case was probably confusing to Festus because of the lack of concrete evidence. But, *of course* there wasn't enough evidence to convict Paul of the accusations against him, because he had *done no wrong!* This was reason enough for acquittal.

c. **King Agrippa:** Herod Agrippa II ruled a client kingdom of the Roman Empire to the northeast of Festus' province, and was reputed to be an expert in Jewish customs and religious matters. Though he did not have jurisdiction over Paul in this case, his hearing of the matter would be helpful for Festus.

i. Of this **King Agrippa**, his great-grandfather had tried to kill Jesus as a baby; his grandfather had John the Baptist

beheaded; his father had martyred the first apostle, James. Now Paul stands before the next in line of the Herods, Herod Agrippa.

ii. **Bernice** was his sister, and rumors were rife that their relationship was incestuous.

iii. Herod Agrippa II didn't rule over much territory, but was of great influence because the emperor gave him the right to oversee the affairs of the temple in Jerusalem and the appointment of the high priest.

d. The appearance before **King Agrippa** was really a *hearing*, and not a *trial*; Agrippa did not have jurisdiction in the matter.

2. (Act_25:23-27) Festus makes an opening statement at the hearing of Paul before Agrippa.

So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in. And Festus said: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him."

a. **When Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp:** In the midst of all the pomp and pageantry, remember just who is on trial here! Really, Festus, Agrippa, Bernice and the rest are all on trial before the God who Paul preaches; Paul is not on trial before them.

i. Voltaire, the famous French infidel, called Paul a “ugly little Jew.” Perhaps that was an accurate *physical* description of the man; but he is the one with the authority and dignity here.

ii. “All these very important people would have been greatly surprised, and not a little scandalized, could they have foreseen the relative estimates that later generations would form of them and of the prisoner who now stood before them to state his case.” (Bruce)

b. So that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write: Festus will use this trial to prepare an official brief for Paul’s upcoming trial before Caesar.

(Act 25:2) So the chief priests and the most prominent men⁵ of the Jews brought formal charges⁶ against Paul to him.

(Act 25:3) Requesting him to do them a favor against Paul,⁷ they urged Festus⁸ to summon him to Jerusalem, planning an ambush⁹ to kill him along the way.

(Act 25:4) Then Festus¹⁰ replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea,¹¹ and he himself intended to go there¹² shortly.

(Act 25:5) “So,” he said, “let your leaders¹³ go down there¹⁴ with me, and if this man has done anything wrong,¹⁵ they may bring charges¹⁶ against him.”

(Act 25:6) After Festus¹⁷ had stayed¹⁸ not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea,¹⁹ and the next day he sat²⁰ on the judgment seat²¹ and ordered Paul to be brought.

(Act 25:7) When he arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him,²² bringing many serious²³ charges that they were not able to prove.²⁴

(Act 25:8) Paul said in his defense,²⁵ “I have committed no offense²⁶ against the Jewish law²⁷ or against the temple or against Caesar.”²⁸

(Act 25:9) But Festus,²⁹ wanting to do the Jews a favor, asked Paul, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and be tried³⁰ before me there on these charges?”³¹

(Act 25:10) Paul replied,³² "I am standing before Caesar's³³ judgment seat,³⁴ where I should be tried.³⁵ I have done nothing wrong³⁶

to the Jews, as you also know very well.³⁷

(Act 25:11) If then I am in the wrong³⁸ and have done anything that deserves death, I am not trying to escape dying,³⁹ but if not one of their charges against me is true,⁴⁰ no one can hand me over to them.⁴¹ I appeal to Caesar!"⁴²

(Act 25:12) Then, after conferring with his council,⁴³ Festus⁴⁴ replied, "You have appealed to Caesar;⁴⁵ to Caesar⁴⁶ you will go!"⁴⁷

(Act 25:13) ***Festus Asks King Agrippa for Advice***

After several days had passed, King Agrippa⁴⁸ and Bernice arrived at Caesarea⁴⁹ to pay their respects⁵⁰ to Festus.⁵¹

(Act 25:14) While⁵² they were staying there many days, Festus⁵³ explained Paul's case to the king to get his opinion,⁵⁴ saying, "There is a man left here as a prisoner by Felix.

(Act 25:15) When I was in Jerusalem,⁵⁵ the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed⁵⁶ me about him,⁵⁷ asking for a sentence of condemnation⁵⁸ against him.

(Act 25:16) I answered them⁵⁹ that it was not the custom of the Romans to hand over anyone⁶⁰ before the accused had met his accusers face to face⁶¹ and had been given⁶² an opportunity to make a defense against the accusation.⁶³

(Act 25:17) So after they came back here with me,⁶⁴ I did not postpone the case,⁶⁵ but the next day I sat⁶⁶ on the judgment seat⁶⁷ and ordered the man to be brought.

(Act 25:18) When his accusers stood up, they did not charge⁶⁸ him with any of the evil deeds I had suspected.⁶⁹

(Act 25:19) Rather they had several points of disagreement⁷⁰ with him about their own religion⁷¹ and about a man named Jesus⁷² who was dead, whom Paul claimed⁷³ to be alive.

(Act 25:20) Because I was at a loss⁷⁴ how I could investigate these matters,⁷⁵ I asked if he were willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried⁷⁶

there on these charges.⁷⁷

(Act 25:21) But when Paul appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of His Majesty the Emperor,⁷⁸ I ordered him to be kept under guard until I could send him to Caesar."⁷⁹

(Act 25:22) Agrippa⁸⁰ said to Festus,⁸¹ "I would also like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he replied,⁸² "you will hear him."

(Act 25:23) ***Paul Before King Agrippa and Bernice***

So the next day Agrippa⁸³ and Bernice came with great pomp⁸⁴ and entered the audience hall,⁸⁵ along with the senior military officers⁸⁶ and the prominent men of the city. When Festus⁸⁷ gave the order,⁸⁸ Paul was brought in.

(Act 25:24) Then Festus⁸⁹ said, "King Agrippa,⁹⁰ and all you who are present here with us, you see this man about whom the entire Jewish populace⁹¹ petitioned⁹² me both in Jerusalem⁹³ and here,⁹⁴ shouting loudly⁹⁵ that he ought not to live any longer.

(Act 25:25) But I found that he had done nothing that deserved death,⁹⁶ and when he appealed⁹⁷ to His Majesty the Emperor,⁹⁸ I decided to send him.⁹⁹

(Act 25:26) But I have nothing definite¹⁰⁰ to write to my lord¹⁰¹ about him.¹⁰² Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa,¹⁰³ so that after this preliminary hearing¹⁰⁴ I may have something to write.

(Act 25:27) For it seems unreasonable to me to send a prisoner without clearly indicating¹⁰⁵ the charges against him."

(Act 26:1) ***Paul Offers His Defense***

So Agrippa¹ said to Paul, "You have permission² to speak for yourself." Then Paul held out his hand³ and began his

defense:4

(Guzik)

Act 26:1-32

Acts 26 - PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE KING AGRIPPA

A. Paul on trial before King Agrippa (continued).

1. (Act_26:1-3) Paul's introductory words.

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently."

a. **Then Agrippa said to Paul:** Remember Paul stands before the man whose great-grandfather had tried to kill Jesus as a baby; his grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded; his father had martyred the first apostle, James. This was a man whose family history made him unlikely to receive Paul warmly!

b. **I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you:** Paul *is* happy to speak before Agrippa. First, because he is pleased to have the evidence of his case examined closely by the highest officials, but also because he is pleased to preach the gospel to kings!

i. This was a partial fulfillment of what the Lord promised Paul at his conversion: *Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.* (Act_9:15)

2. (Act_26:4-11) Paul describes his life before his conversion.

"My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know.

They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this *promise* our twelve tribes, earnestly serving *God* night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities."

a. **According to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee:** Paul states his credentials as a faithful Jew before his conversion to Jesus Christ, and reminds Agrippa that he is still walking in faithful fulfillment of the **promise made by God to our fathers**.

b. Agrippa was an *expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews* (Act_26:3), yet he did not believe that God could, or would, raise the dead. Paul boldly exposes the foolishness of limiting God this way, by saying to Agrippa: **Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?**

i. **Why should it be thought incredible** that God can do anything? We must stop putting God in a small box, and realize that the only thing that limits God is His own Word, because He will always honor His word (Psa_138:2).

c. **I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth:** Paul also described his hatred of Christianity before his conversion, and his energetic persecution of Christians.

d. **I cast my vote against them** clearly implies that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin, having a vote against

Christians who were tried before the Sanhedrin (like Stephen in Acts 7).

i. If Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin, it also means that at that time he was married, because it was required for all members of the Sanhedrin. Since as a Christian, he was single (1Co_7:7-9), it may mean that Paul's wife either died or deserted him when he became a Christian.

3. (Act_26:12-20) Paul describes his conversion and its aftermath.

"While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? *It is* hard for you to kick against the goads.' So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance."

a. **As I journeyed to Damascus:** Here Paul gives the fullest account yet of his experience on the Damascus road, detailing the fact that he was made aware of his commission to the Gentiles even at that time.

i. The commission was clear: **For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness.** Paul was commissioned to be two things. First, a **minister**, which means he was to be a *servant* of **the things which** he had **seen, and of the things which** Jesus would **yet reveal** to him. The commission of the Christian is not to make the message or his testimony serve him; he is called to *serve* the message. Second, Paul was called to be a **witness** of those **things**. The commission of the Christian is not to create experience or create the message, but to **witness** it and experience it.

ii. Right now, as he stands before Agrippa, Paul is being obedient to this command of Jesus. Paul knew the significance of telling others what Jesus had done in his life. He knew how to present the gospel not only in words, but also by his life story, presenting the truth that once he was lost, now he was found

b. **But rise and stand on your feet:** Jesus called Paul up to his feet. This was not because his humility wasn't proper, but because he was sent to go somewhere, and he had to **rise and stand on his feet** if he was going to go anywhere!

c. **That they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance:** This is a neat summary of Paul's message.

4. (Act_26:21-23) Paul summarizes his defense.

"For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill *me*. Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come; that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles."

a. **For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me:** Paul plainly states the truth of the case. It is only because he sought to bring the gospel

of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles that the Jews **seized** him and **tried to kill** him. It wasn't because he was a political revolutionary or because he offended the sanctity of the temple.

b. **Saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come:** Paul also states his unswerving commitment to the same gospel, because that gospel is based solidly on the Word of God (**the prophets and Moses**) not on the traditions or spiritual experiences of man.

c. **That the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.** These were the three main points to Paul's preaching: Jesus' death, resurrection, and the preaching of gospel to the whole world, without respect to either Jew or Gentile.

B. Agrippa's response to Paul's defense.

1. (Act_26:24-26) Agrippa asserts Paul is mad, and Paul responds.

Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"

But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner."

a. **Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!** The gospel, when properly presented, will make some people think we are crazy. Paul put it this way: *the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing* (1Co_1:18).

b. **I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason:** Yet, Paul knows that not only is his gospel *true*, it is also *reasonable*. Our God may sometimes act *above* reason, but never *contrary* to reason.

c. Paul's gospel was characterized by **truth** and **reason**, because it was based on *historical events* (such as the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus), things which were **not done in a corner**, but open to examination.

2. (Act_26:27-29) Agrippa is *almost* persuaded to become a Christian.

"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

a. **King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe:** Paul brought the challenge home with a shot to the heart: **do you believe?**

i. Any faithful presentation of the gospel knows when it is appropriate to press the challenge home, and how to press it. Paul knew that this was the time.

b. **You almost persuade me to become a Christian:** The literal idea behind **almost** is "in a little, you seek to persuade me to act a Christian." The meaning of *little* could be "in a short time" or it could mean "there is little distance between me and Christianity".

i. If the sense is "almost," Agrippa's reply is especially sorry. Of course, **almost** being a Christian means that you **almost** have eternal life and will **almost** be delivered from the judgment of hell; but **almost** isn't enough.

ii. Far from being admired for how far he did come, Agrippa condemned himself even more by admitting how close he has come to the gospel and how clearly he has understood it, while still rejecting it.

c. **To become a Christian:** What in fact is a Christian? What had Agrippa **almost** become? Act_26:18 describes five things that happened to Paul when he became a Christian. A Christian has their eyes opened. A Christian has turned from darkness to light. A Christian has turned from

the power of Satan to God. A Christian has received forgiveness of sins.

And a Christian has an inheritance among those set apart to God.

d. What stopped Agrippa short? Why did he only **almost** become a Christian?

i. Why was Agrippa only **almost** persuaded? One answer is the person sitting next to him - Bernice. She was a sinful, immoral companion, and he may have rightly realized that becoming a Christian would mean losing her and his other immoral friends. He was unwilling to make that sacrifice!

ii. On the other side of Agrippa sat Festus - a man's man, a no-nonsense man, a man who thought Paul was crazy.

Perhaps Agrippa thought, "I can't become a Christian! Festus will think I'm crazy too!" And because he wanted the praise of men, he rejected Jesus. "Alas, how many are influenced by fear of men! Oh, you cowards, will you be damned out of fear? Will you sooner let your souls perish than show your manhood by telling a poor mortal that you defy his scorn? Dare you not follow the right through all men in the world should call you to do the wrong?

Oh, you cowards! You cowards! How you deserve to perish who have not enough soul to call your souls your own, but cower down before the sneers of fools!" (Spurgeon)

iii. In front of Agrippa is Paul - a strong man, a noble man, and man of wisdom and character - but a man in chains.

Does Agrippa say, "Well, if I became a Christian, I might end up in chains like Paul! Or at least, I would have to associate with him! We can't have that - I'm an important person!" "O that men were wise enough to see that

suffering for Christ is honour, that loss for truth is gain, that the truest dignity rests in wearing the chain upon the arm rather than endure the chain upon the soul." (Spurgeon)

e. **I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and**

altogether such as I am, except for these chains: Paul declares his continued trust in the gospel of Jesus Christ. He has not retreated from his stand one inch, despite his long imprisonment for the sake of the gospel.

f. **Except for these chains:** With a dramatic gesture, Paul shows that even though he is in chains, he has more freedom in Jesus than any of the royalty listening have.

i. “O that men were wise enough to see that suffering for Christ is honour, that loss for truth is gain, that the truest dignity rests in wearing the chain upon the arm rather than endure the chain upon the soul.” (Spurgeon)

3. (Act_26:30-32) Agrippa admits Paul’s innocence, yet forwards him to Caesar.

When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, “This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.” Then Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

a. **This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains:** Agrippa also sees there is no *evidence* offered to support the accusations against Paul, and he respects Paul’s great integrity, even while rejecting Paul’s gospel. So, Agrippa and the others pronounced a “not guilty” verdict.

b. **This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar:** Yet, Paul cannot be **set free**, because he has **appealed to Caesar**. It seems that once an appeal was made, it could not be retracted.

c. It seems that Paul might have been set free here if he had not appealed to Caesar. So, was Paul’s appeal to Caesar a good thing or a bad thing?

i. Some people believe it was a bad thing, and that Paul was trusting in the power of the Roman legal system instead of in the power of God. They say that Paul might have been set free by Agrippa if he had not appealed to Caesar.

ii. However, we should see the fulfillment of God's plan through all these events. By his appeal to Caesar, Paul will have the opportunity to preach to the Roman Emperor the way he had to Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, thus fulfilling the promise that Paul would *bear My name before . . . kings* (Act_9:15).

iii. The appeal to Caesar, and his subsequent journey to Rome at the Empire's expense, were also the fulfillment of the Holy Spirit's purpose that Paul go to Rome (Act_19:21; Act_23:11). This also answered a long-standing desire in the heart of Paul to visit the already present Christian community there (Rom_1:9-13).

(Act 26:2) "Regarding all the things I have been accused of by the Jews, King Agrippa,⁵ I consider myself fortunate that I am about to make my defense before you today, (Act 26:3) because you are especially⁶ familiar with all the customs and controversial issues⁷ of the Jews. Therefore I ask⁸ you to listen to me patiently.

(Act 26:4) Now all the Jews know the way I lived⁹ from my youth, spending my life from the beginning among my own people¹⁰ and in Jerusalem.¹¹

(Act 26:5) They know,¹² because they have known¹³ me from time past,¹⁴ if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party¹⁵ of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee.¹⁶

(Act 26:6) And now I stand here on trial¹⁷ because of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors,¹⁸

(Act 26:7) a promise¹⁹ that our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly serve God²⁰ night and day. Concerning this hope the Jews are accusing me,²¹ Your Majesty!²²

(Act 26:8) Why do you people²³ think²⁴ it is unbelievable²⁵ that²⁶ God raises the dead?

(Act 26:9) Of course,²⁷ I myself was convinced²⁸ that it was necessary to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus the Nazarene.

(Act 26:10) And that is what I did in Jerusalem: Not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons by the authority I received²⁹ from the chief priests, but I also cast my vote³⁰ against them when they were sentenced to death.³¹

(Act 26:11) I punished³² them often in all the synagogues³³ and tried to force³⁴ them to blaspheme. Because I was so furiously enraged³⁵ at them, I went to persecute³⁶ them even in foreign cities.

(Act 26:12) "While doing this very thing,³⁷ as I was going³⁸ to Damascus with authority and complete power³⁹ from the chief priests, (Act 26:13) about noon along the road, Your Majesty,⁴⁰ I saw a light from heaven,⁴¹ brighter than the sun, shining everywhere around⁴²

me and those traveling with me.

(Act 26:14) When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic,⁴³ 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

You are hurting yourself⁴⁴ by kicking against the goads.'⁴⁵

(Act 26:15) So I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord replied,⁴⁶ 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

(Act 26:16) But get up and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this reason, to designate you in advance⁴⁷ as a servant and witness⁴⁸ to the things⁴⁹ you have seen⁵⁰ and to the things in which I will appear to you.

(Act 26:17) I will rescue⁵¹ you from your own people⁵² and from the Gentiles, to whom⁵³ I am sending you

(Act 26:18) to open their eyes so that they turn⁵⁴ from darkness to light and from the power⁵⁵ of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share⁵⁶ among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

(Act 26:19) "Therefore, King Agrippa,⁵⁷ I was not disobedient⁵⁸ to the heavenly⁵⁹ vision,

(Act 26:20) but I declared to those in Damascus first, and then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea,⁶⁰ and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God,⁶¹ performing deeds consistent with⁶² repentance.

(Act 26:21) For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple courts⁶³ and were trying to kill me.

(Act 26:22) I have experienced⁶⁴ help from God to this day, and so I stand testifying to both small and great, saying nothing except⁶⁵

what the prophets and Moses said⁶⁶ was going to happen:

(Act 26:23) that⁶⁷ the Christ⁶⁸ was to suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, to proclaim light both to our people⁶⁹ and to the Gentiles."⁷⁰

(Act 26:24) As Paul⁷¹ was saying these things in his defense, Festus⁷² exclaimed loudly, "You have lost your mind,⁷³ Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane!"

(Act 26:25) But Paul replied,⁷⁴ "I have not lost my mind, most excellent Festus,⁷⁵ but am speaking⁷⁶ true and rational⁷⁷ words.

(Act 26:26) For the king knows about these things, and I am speaking freely⁷⁸ to him,⁷⁹ because I cannot believe⁸⁰ that any of these things has escaped his notice,⁸¹ for this was not done in a corner.⁸²

(Act 26:27) Do you believe the prophets,⁸³ King Agrippa?⁸⁴ I know that you believe."

(Act 26:28) Agrippa⁸⁵ said to Paul, "In such a short time are you persuading me to become a Christian?"⁸⁶

(Act 26:29) Paul replied, "I pray to God that whether in a short or a long time⁸⁷ not only you but also all those who are listening to me today could become such as I am, except for these chains."⁸⁸

(Act 26:30) So the king got up, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them,

(Act 26:31) and as they were leaving they said to one another,⁸⁹ "This man is not doing anything deserving⁹⁰ death or imprisonment."

(Act 26:32) Agrippa⁹¹ said to Festus,⁹² "This man could have been released⁹³ if he had not appealed to Caesar."⁹⁴

(Act 27:1) ***Paul and Company Sail for Rome***

When it was decided we¹ would sail to Italy,² they handed over Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion³ of the Augustan Cohort⁴ named Julius.

(Guzik)

Act 27:1-44

Acts 27 - SHIPWRECK ON THE WAY TO ROME

A. From Caesarea to Fair Havens.

1. (Act_27:1-8) Paul is taken by ship to the island of Crete.

And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to *one* named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia.

Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. And the next *day* we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave *him* liberty to go to his friends and receive care. When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under *the shelter of* Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, *a city* of Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board. When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under *the shelter of* Crete off Salmone. Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.

a. **Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment:** We don't know much about this specific **Augustan Regiment** (several held that title), but it was common for Roman soldiers to accompany the transport of criminals, those awaiting trial, and merchant ships filled with grain going from Egypt to Rome.

b. **Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us:** Paul was accompanied by **Aristarchus** and Luke (notice the **us** of Act_27:2 and beyond) on this voyage. While some have thought that they went "undercover" with

Paul as his “slaves,” it is just as likely that **Aristarchus** paid his fare as a passenger and that Luke was on board as the ship’s doctor.

c. **Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care:** The kindness Paul received reflected both his status as an uncondemned man awaiting an appeal before Caesar, and his evident godly character, giving him favor before man.

i. Paul was different from the other prisoners on board. The other prisoners were probably all condemned criminals being sent to Rome to die in the arena.

d. The ship begins to make its way west, eventually coming to the port called **Fair Havens** on the south side of the island of Crete.

2. (Act_27:9-12) The decision is made to sail on, instead of wintering at the city of Fair Havens on the island of Crete.

Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.”

Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul.

And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, *and winter there*.

a. **Sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over:** The **Fast** date in question here was probably October 5, which was the date of the Day of Atonement in AD 59. The idea is that now as winter approaches, the weather will become more dangerous for sailing.

i. “The dangerous season for sailing began about September 14 and lasted until November 11; after the latter date

all navigation on the open sea came to an end until winter was over.” (Bruce)

b. The name **Fair Havens** was not entirely accurate - at least not accurate in the winter. The position of the bay made it vulnerable to winter winds and storms. It was not an ideal place to wait out the coming season.

i. There was a risk in staying at Fair Havens; there was a risk in looking for a safer port to winter in. Which way was best? Many of the problems we face in life are like this; there are not easy decisions, just two tough decisions to choose from.

c. **Paul advised them:** Paul isn't really speaking as a prophet of God, but as an experienced traveler on the waters of the Mediterranean, having logged some 3,500 miles by sea. In his experience as a traveler, Paul advised that they not go on.

i. In addition, Paul had already been in three shipwrecks (2Co_11:25). He knew what stormy seas were like!

d. **Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul:** We can't be surprised the centurion had more respect for the opinion of the chief sailor and the owner of the ship, than for Paul's opinion. They both had much to lose if the ship didn't make it to Rome.

i. As well, it may be that the sailors did not want to spend three months wintering in the small town of *Lasea*, so they opted to try for the larger city of **Phoenix** on Crete.

B. The stormy journey from Fair Havens to Malta.

1. (Act_27:13-20) A good start is made from Crete, but the ship quickly encounters great difficulty in a storm.

When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let *her* drive. And running under *the shelter of* an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. When they had taken it on board, they used

cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the *Syrtis Sands*, they struck sail and so were driven. And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next *day* they lightened the ship. On the third *day* we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on *us*, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.

a. **Euroclydon**: This wind was feared among ancient sailors for its destructive power. The sailors on board knew they were clearly in for a bad time.

b. **We secured the skiff with difficulty**: The skiff was normally towed behind the boat, but was taken aboard at bad weather - so they brought it in.

i. **We secured the skiff with difficulty** may be quite literal from Luke's perspective. The doctor was probably pressed into service pulling ropes!

c. Using **cables to undergird the ship** was a customary practice sometimes called "frapping." It helped prevent the ship from breaking apart in a storm.

d. **Fearing they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands**: The **Syrtis Sands** were an infamous "graveyard" of ships off the coast of North Africa, feared like a "Bermuda Triangle." At all costs, the sailors wanted to avoid this area.

e. That they saw **neither sun nor stars** shows just how desperate their plight was, because these were the only tools of navigation they had. No wonder **all hope that we would be saved was finally given up**.

i. **All hope . . . finally given up**: Is this a good or a bad place to be? It is a good place if you are convinced there is no way to save yourself. Then you can look to Jesus to save you.

2. (Act_27:21-26) Paul reveals to the crew what God promised him about their fate.

But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to

me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island."

a. The **long abstinence from food** probably had nothing to do with fasting, but instead with the poor condition of the food during such a storm and the prevalence of seasickness among everyone!

b. **Men, you should have listened to me:** Paul can't resist - and rightly so - an "I told you so" in this situation.

c. **There will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship:** The promise that there would be **no loss of life**, only the destruction of the ship, would sound like a bad deal in our materialistic age.

d. **There stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve:** The angel of God who appeared to Paul did more than assure *Paul's* survival. Paul already *knew* that he would survive, because God promised he would appear before Caesar (Act_19:21 and Act_23:11). But the angel also promised something worth telling the passengers and the crew: **God has granted you all who sail with you.**

i. The angel told Paul, **do not be afraid**. This must mean there was a *reason* why Paul needed to heart those words. He struggled with fear in such circumstances like any man.

e. **I believe God that it will be just as it was told me** is the essence of what it means to put our faith in God and His Word. Paul's unshakable confidence in God made him a leader among these people, even though he was a prisoner of Rome.

i. Take note of what Paul said: “**I believe God.**” He didn’t say, “I believe *in* God.” Every demon in hell agrees with the existence of God. Paul declared his total confidence in God’s promise.

ii. Paul believed God when there was nothing else to believe. He couldn’t believe the sailors, the ship, the sails, the wind, the centurion, human ingenuity or anything else - only God and God alone. This was not a fair-weather faith; he believed God in the midst of the storm, when circumstances were at their worst. Paul would say along with Job:

Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him (Job_13:15). His terrible situation was real, but God was more real to Paul than the dreadful circumstances.

iii. Paul was not *ashamed* to say that he believed God. “I would to God that all Christians were prepared to throw down the gauntlet and to come out straight; for if God be not true let us not pretend to trust him, and if the gospel be a lie let us be honest enough to confess it.” (Spurgeon)

f. **Therefore, take heart, men:** Paul used his belief to strengthen the hearts of others. Most all of the people on this ship were not Christians, yet Paul still cared enough to strengthen their hearts by telling them about his belief in God. If Paul had the attitude of some people today, he would have thought, “Hey, they’re all going to hell anyway - who cares?”

But Paul loved more than that.

g. **On a certain island** means that God did not tell Paul *everything* about what was going to happen. Paul had to trust that *God* knew which island they would **run aground** on!

3. (Act_27:27-38) On the fourteenth night of the storm, Paul ministers to the passengers and crew.

Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land. And they took soundings and found *it* to be twenty fathoms; and

when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found *it* to be fifteen fathoms. Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come. And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off. And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored *them* all to take food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you." And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken *it* he began to eat. Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves.

And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.

a. **The sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land:** Sensing land was near (probably by hearing the breakers in the distance) the sailors took proper precautions against being crashed against some unknown rocks (**they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come**).

b. **Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."**

Paul knew two reasons why they had to stay together. First, the ship's passengers desperately needed the crew's expertise, and it would be fatal if the crew abandoned the passengers. Second, Paul probably sensed that God's

promise to give him the lives of the whole ship's company assumed that they would stay together.

c. **Since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you:** Paul had a word of faith and confidence from the Lord for the frightened crew and passengers. But this word only benefited those who *believed* it.

i. God has scores of promises of His comfort and care for us in desperate times, but they only benefit us if we *believe* them.

d. **And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. Then they were all encouraged:** There are hints that Paul regarded this meal as communion at the Lord's table for the Christians present.

e. **They lightened the ship:** Throwing **out the wheat into the sea** reflected their great desperation. This was the essential cargo of the ship, and they were throwing away all chance of making a profit or breaking even on the trip. This was a pure struggle for survival.

4. (Act_27:39-44) The ship runs aground and all are safe, in fulfillment of God's promise through Paul.

When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible. And they let go the anchors and left *them* in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump *overboard* first and get to land, and the rest, some on

boards and some on *parts* of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.

a. **They did not recognize the land:** They did not know it at first, but they came to an island called Malta. The place where the ship came aground is now called St. Paul's Bay.

i. "Only the rarest conjunction of favorable circumstances could have brought about such a fortunate ending to their apparently hopeless situation . . . all these circumstances are united in St. Paul's Bay." (Ramsay, cited by Bruce)

b. "If they missed Malta, there would have been nothing for it but to hold on for 200 miles until they struck the Tunisian coast, and no one could have expected the ship to survive that long." (Bruce)

c. **And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape:** To the soldiers, it made sense to kill the prisoners, because Roman military law decreed that a guard who allowed his prisoner to escape was subject to the same penalty the escaped prisoner would have suffered - in the case of most of these prisoners, death.

d. **But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose:** God gave Paul favor in the eyes of this Roman **centurion**, and that favor kept Paul and all the prisoners alive - in fulfillment of the word spoken to Paul, *God has granted you all those who sail with you* (Act_27:24). God's word never fails!

(Act_27:2) We went on board⁵ a ship from Adramyttium⁶ that was about to sail to various ports⁷ along the coast of the province of Asia⁸

and put out to sea,⁹ accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian¹⁰ from Thessalonica.¹¹

(Act_27:3) The next day we put in¹² at Sidon,¹³ and Julius, treating Paul kindly,¹⁴ allowed him to go to his friends so they could provide him with what he needed.¹⁵

(Act 27:4) From there we put out to sea¹⁶ and sailed under the lee¹⁷ of Cyprus because the winds were against us.

(Act 27:5) After we had sailed across the open sea¹⁸ off Cilicia and Pamphylia,¹⁹ we put in²⁰ at Myra²¹ in Lycia.²²

(Act 27:6) There the centurion²³ found²⁴ a ship from Alexandria²⁵ sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it.

(Act 27:7) We sailed slowly²⁶ for many days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus.²⁷ Because the wind prevented us from going any farther,²⁸ we sailed under the lee²⁹ of Crete off Salmone.³⁰

(Act 27:8) With difficulty we sailed along the coast³¹ of Crete³² and came to a place called Fair Havens that was near the town of Lasea.³³

(Act 27:9) ***Caught in a Violent Storm***

Since considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous³⁴ because the fast³⁵ was already over,³⁶ Paul advised them,³⁷

(Act 27:10) "Men, I can see the voyage is going to end³⁸ in disaster³⁹ and great loss not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives."⁴⁰

(Act 27:11) But the centurion⁴¹ was more convinced⁴² by the captain⁴³ and the ship's owner than by what Paul said.⁴⁴

(Act 27:12) Because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided⁴⁵ to put out to sea⁴⁶ from there. They hoped that⁴⁷ somehow they could reach⁴⁸ Phoenix,⁴⁹ a harbor of Crete facing⁵⁰ southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

(Act 27:13) When a gentle south wind sprang up, they thought⁵¹ they could carry out⁵² their purpose, so they weighed anchor⁵³ and sailed close along the coast⁵⁴ of Crete.

(Act 27:14) Not long after this, a hurricane-force⁵⁵ wind called the northeaster⁵⁶ blew down from the island.⁵⁷

(Act 27:15) When the ship was caught in it⁵⁸ and could not head into⁵⁹ the wind, we gave way to it and were driven⁶⁰ along.

(Act 27:16) As we ran under the lee of⁶¹ a small island called Cauda,⁶² we were able with difficulty to get the ship's boat⁶³ under control.

(Act 27:17) After the crew⁶⁴ had hoisted it aboard,⁶⁵ they used supports⁶⁶ to undergird the ship. Fearing they would run aground⁶⁷ on the Syrtis,⁶⁸ they lowered the sea anchor,⁶⁹ thus letting themselves be driven along.

(Act 27:18) The next day, because we were violently battered by the storm,⁷⁰ they began throwing the cargo overboard,⁷¹

(Act 27:19) and on the third day they threw the ship's gear⁷² overboard with their own hands.

(Act 27:20) When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and a violent⁷³ storm continued to batter us,⁷⁴ we finally abandoned all hope of being saved.⁷⁵

(Act 27:21) Since many of them had no desire to eat,⁷⁶ Paul⁷⁷ stood up⁷⁸ among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me⁷⁹

and not put out to sea⁸⁰ from Crete, thus avoiding⁸¹ this damage and loss.

(Act 27:22) And now I advise⁸² you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only the ship will be lost.⁸³

(Act 27:23) For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong⁸⁴ and whom I serve⁸⁵ came to me⁸⁶

(Act 27:24) and said,⁸⁷ 'Do not be afraid, Paul! You must stand before⁸⁸ Caesar,⁸⁹ and God has graciously granted you the safety⁹⁰ of all who are sailing with you.'

(Act 27:25) Therefore keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God⁹¹ that it will be just as I have been told.

(Act 27:26) But we must⁹² run aground on some island."

(Act 27:27) When the fourteenth night had come, while we were being driven⁹³ across the Adriatic Sea,⁹⁴ about

midnight the sailors suspected they were approaching some land.⁹⁵

(Act 27:28) They took soundings⁹⁶ and found the water was twenty fathoms⁹⁷ deep; when they had sailed a little farther⁹⁸ they took soundings again and found it was fifteen fathoms⁹⁹ deep.

(Act 27:29) Because they were afraid¹⁰⁰ that we would run aground on the rocky coast,¹⁰¹ they threw out¹⁰² four anchors from the stern and wished¹⁰³ for day to appear.¹⁰⁴

(Act 27:30) Then when the sailors tried to escape from the ship and were lowering the ship's boat into the sea, pretending¹⁰⁵ that they were going to put out anchors from the bow, (Act 27:31) Paul said to the centurion¹⁰⁶ and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you¹⁰⁷ cannot be saved."

(Act 27:32) Then the soldiers cut the ropes¹⁰⁸ of the ship's boat and let it drift away.¹⁰⁹

(Act 27:33) As day was about to dawn,¹¹⁰ Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day you have been in suspense¹¹¹ and have gone¹¹² without food; you have eaten nothing.¹¹³

(Act 27:34) Therefore I urge you to take some food, for this is important¹¹⁴ for your survival.¹¹⁵ For not one of you will lose a hair from his head."

(Act 27:35) After he said this, Paul¹¹⁶ took bread¹¹⁷ and gave thanks to God in front of them all,¹¹⁸ broke¹¹⁹ it, and began to eat.

(Act 27:36) So all of them were encouraged and took food themselves.

(Act 27:37) (We were in all two hundred seventy-six¹²⁰ persons on the ship.)¹²¹

(Act 27:38) When they had eaten enough to be satisfied,¹²² they lightened the ship by throwing the wheat¹²³ into the sea.

(Act 27:39) ***Paul is Shipwrecked***

When day came, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed¹²⁴ a bay¹²⁵ with a beach,¹²⁶ where they decided to run the ship aground if they could.

(Act 27:40) So they slipped¹²⁷ the anchors¹²⁸ and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the linkage¹²⁹ that bound the steering oars¹³⁰ together. Then they hoisted¹³¹ the foresail¹³² to the wind and steered toward¹³³ the beach.

(Act 27:41) But they encountered a patch of crosscurrents¹³⁴ and ran the ship aground; the bow stuck fast and could not be moved, but the stern was being broken up by the force¹³⁵ of the waves.

(Act 27:42) Now the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners¹³⁶ so that none of them would escape by swimming away.¹³⁷

(Act 27:43) But the centurion,¹³⁸ wanting to save Paul's life,¹³⁹ prevented them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land,¹⁴⁰

(Act 27:44) and the rest were to follow,¹⁴¹ some on planks¹⁴² and some on pieces of the ship.¹⁴³ And in this way¹⁴⁴ all were brought safely to land.

(Act 28:1) ***Paul on Malta***

After we had safely reached shore,¹ we learned that the island was called Malta.²

(Guzik)

Act 28:1-31

Acts 28 - PAUL ARRIVES IN ROME

A. Paul's ministry on the island of Malta.

1. (Act_28:1-6) The islanders of Malta are impressed when Paul is miraculously unharmed by a snake-bite.

Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.

But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid *them* on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.” But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

a. **They then found out that the island was called Malta:** These experienced sailors would certainly have known the island of Malta, but not this side of the island. Almost all the traffic to Malta came to the main port, on the other side of the island. They didn’t recognize this side of the island.

i. **Malta** means *refuge*, a fitting name!

b. **When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks:** The great apostle gathered wood for the fire, even though there were probably scores of people among the 276 passengers and crew far more suited for the job. Paul’s servant heart was always evident.

c. **A viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand:** Paul was being faithful to God, and being a wonderful servant. But this did not keep him from this trial. The exact thing he was serving in brought forth a **viper**, and the **viper** didn’t just nibble on Paul - it **fastened on his hand**.

i. Paul didn’t let it bother him. He didn’t scream, “Why God? I can’t take any more of this! Can’t You see I’m serving You?” He didn’t look at those sitting by the fire and say, “You lazy bums! If you would have gathered wood instead of me, this wouldn’t have happened to me!” Paul’s reaction seems nonchalant: **He shook off the creature into the fire.**

d. **Yet justice does not allow to live:** The natives were convinced that justice had finally caught up with this prisoner.

Justice is actually a reference to the Greek goddess of justice, *Dikee*. The natives, knowing Paul is a prisoner, assume he has committed a great crime, and the goddess of justice will not permit Paul to escape unpunished.

e. **And suffered no harm:** God didn't preserve Paul from the storm just to let him perish by a snake. Paul is protected. It was promised he would go to Rome (*you must also bear witness at Rome, Act_23:11*), and Paul wasn't at Rome yet. It wasn't so much that nothing would stop Paul as it was that nothing would stop God's promise from being fulfilled.

i. Paul could take God's *past* faithfulness as a *promise* of future blessing and protection.

ii. By extension, we also see that "Divine Justice" has no more claim against Paul - it had all been satisfied by Jesus' work on the cross. God's justice could never harm Paul, nor anyone who has had all their sins paid for by the work of Jesus on the cross.

f. **Said that he was a god:** This is a typically human reaction. For these natives, Paul had to be seen in extremes. Either he was terribly evil or considered **a god**. In truth, Paul was neither a criminal deserving punishment *nor a god*. This is all the more reason we must be cautious about what others think of us, either for good or bad.

2. (Act_28:7-10) Paul heals the father of Publius, and many others.

In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were

healed. They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.

a. **Sick of fever and dysentery:** Some think that the sickness Publius' father had was a malady known as *Malta fever*, which comes from a microorganism found in the milk of Maltese goats. Its symptoms usually last some four months.

b. **The rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed:** This word for **healed** is not the customary word for a miraculous healing. The word more literally means, "*to receive medical attention.*" It may be that Dr. Luke was functioning as a "medical missionary" on Malta.

B. Paul at Rome.

1. (Act_28:11-15) The final leg on Paul's journey to Rome.

After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island.

And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

a. **And so we went toward Rome:** Paul and the others made their way northward up the Italian peninsula, until they are finally greeting outside Rome by Christians from Rome who have come to meet them.

i. **Syracuse** was a famous city in the ancient world, being the capital city of the island of Sicily. Archimedes, the famous mathematician, lived there, and when the Romans conquered the island, a soldier put a dagger to his throat as he worked on a math problem, drawing in the dirt. Archimedes said, "Stop, you're messing up my equation!"

and the soldier killed him.

b. When the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as the Appii Forum and Three Inns:

The Christians in Rome received Paul's famous letter to them a few years before, so they probably felt like they knew him already. They honored him by greeting Paul as the emperors were greeting when they arrived at Rome: they went out to meet him as he came into the city, traveling some 50 miles to do it!

i. "It was a custom when an emperor visited a city for the people to go out and meet him and escort him back into the city." (Horton)

c. "Luke is far from giving the impression that Paul was the first person to bring the gospel to Rome . . . the presence of those Christians - *the brothers*, as Luke calls them - provides evidence enough that the gospel had reached Rome already."

(Bruce)

2. (Act_28:16) Paul's status as a prisoner in Rome.

Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

a. **When we came to Rome:** When Paul came to Rome, the city had existed for almost 800 years. The famous Coliseum had not yet been built but the prominent buildings were the temple of Jupiter, the palaces of Caesar, and a temple to Mars, the god of war. At the time, Rome had a population of about two million - one million slave, one million free. Society was divided into roughly three classes: A small upper class, a large class of the poor, and slaves.

b. **The soldier who guarded him:** "To this soldier he would be lightly chained by the wrist . . . the soldier would be relieved every four hours or so, but for Paul there was no comparable relief." (Bruce)

i. In Php_1:13, written from this Roman custody, Paul speaks of how his message is getting through to the palace

guards of Rome. Though he was the prisoner, he had a truly captive audience!

3. (Act_28:17-22) Paul appeals to the Jewish community of Rome.

And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: “Men *and* brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let *me* go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. But when the Jews spoke against *it*, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see *you* and speak with *you*, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.” Then they said to him, “We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.”

a. **Paul called the leaders of the Jews together:** Paul followed his consistent practice of going to the Jews first in every city he came to as an evangelist.

b. **We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you:** Paul wanted to know what they had heard from Jerusalem about him. All these Jews in Rome were willing to say they knew about Christianity was that it was **spoken against everywhere**.

i. **We neither received letters** shows that the religious leaders who accused Paul in Jerusalem and Caesarea knew their case was hopeless. They made no effort to send ahead documents confirming their case against him.

c. Paul said he was there as a prisoner for the **hope of Israel**. As the year 70 A.D. approached, time was running

out before an unparalleled national calamity struck a Jesus-rejecting Israel.

4. (Act_28:23-24) The Jewish community of Rome hears the gospel from Paul.

So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

a. **He explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening:** This would be a great Bible study to have a tape of! Paul spoke of the **kingdom of God**, and gave an exhaustive study of how the Old Testament spoke of Jesus -

from morning till evening.

b. What did Paul teach regarding **the kingdom of God**? Undoubtedly, Paul taught exactly what Jesus taught: That now, God was bringing a spiritual kingdom that would take root in men's hearts before it took over the governments of this world. The Jews of Jesus' day and of Paul's day were looking for a political kingdom, not a spiritual kingdom.

5. (Act_28:25-29) The Jews reject the gospel again.

So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears, lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.'" Therefore let it be known to you

that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

a. **When they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers."** Paul understood that Isaiah prophesied of the hardness of heart these people would have. Certainly, Paul was gratified that some received the gospel, but he would undoubtedly have been distressed if even *one* of them rejected Jesus!

i. Essentially, Isaiah is saying: "If you reject Jesus, you can hear, but never understand; you can see but never perceive. Your heart is, and will be, hard, your ears closed, and your eyes shut - because you really don't want to turn to God and be healed of your sin." This is a message just as true today as it was when Isaiah first said it - or when Paul quoted it.

b. Paul will plead for men to receive Jesus, but not as a beggar might plead. Paul aches not for himself, but for those who reject - and solemnly must warn those who reject of the consequences.

c. The preacher of the gospel really is preaching two messages. To those who respond to the gospel with faith, he is a messenger of life. But to those who reject Jesus, the preacher *adds* to their condemnation. *To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life.* (2Co_2:16)

d. **When he had said these words, the Jews departed:** In just a few years after Paul's rebuke of this Jewish rejection of Jesus, the Jewish people of Judea would be slaughtered wholesale and Jerusalem destroyed. God's judgment was coming, and part of Paul's frustration was that he sensed this.

6. (Act_28:30-31) Paul spends two years in Rome before his trial in Caesar's court.

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

a. **Then Paul dwelt two years:** “The two years’ prolongation of Paul’s stay in Rome could be accounted for adequately by congestion of court business. It took that time for his case to come up for hearing.” (Bruce)

i. Why did Paul get stuck at Rome for **two years**? There are many reasons, but three big reasons are the letters to the *Ephesians*, the *Philippians*, and the *Colossians*. God didn’t waste Paul’s time in Rome. God never wastes our time, though we may waste it by not sensing God’s purpose for our lives at the moment.

b. **His own rented house** means that Paul supported himself during this period. Paul was always a hard-working man.

c. **Received all who came to him:** One example someone who he **received** in Rome was a convert of Paul’s, a runaway slave named Onesimus (Phm_1:10), who Paul told to go back to his master Philemon!

d. Certainly, Paul had his appearance before Caesar Nero; and there is also no doubt that he boldly and powerfully proclaimed the gospel to him - as God had promised he would (Act_9:15; Act_23:11).

e. It seems likely that Paul was acquitted of these charges, and enjoyed a few more years of liberty until he was arrested again, imprisoned, condemned, and executed in Rome at the command of Nero - as the historical traditions of the early church state.

i. Why did Luke not record Paul’s appearance before Caesar? Probably because the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were composed as a “friend-of-the-court” brief to be used in Paul’s trial before Caesar.

f. **No one forbidding him** has the idea of *completely unhindered*. Paul’s chains and custody mattered nothing.

The word of God was unhindered.

i. In the last two chapters, Paul's life was threatened by the sea, by soldiers, and by a snake. But God delivered him from them all.

ii. God wants to show through this detailed description of the trials of Paul on the way to Rome that God's man, fulfilling God's will, *cannot* be stopped - though all kinds of difficulty may come in the way.

iii. Finally, even the unbelief of the Jews - or anyone else's rejection of Jesus - will not hinder the gospel. The gospel will go forth without any hindrance.

iv. Mat_22:1-14 is a parabolic illustration of the Book of Acts. God prepared a feast for Israel, and invited them to come (in the days of Jesus' ministry), but they would not come. Then, He sent out a second invitation, after *all things* were *ready*. But they did not come then either; instead, they killed God's servants who brought the message of the feast. Finally, God invited all that would come, including Gentiles - but they could only come if they were clothed in the garments of Jesus.

g. There is no end to the story. Why? Because this same story is repeated again and again throughout the history of the church. Trusting in Jesus, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Father, the word of God will continue to spread without hindrance and continue to change lives for the glory of God. The Book of Acts really is a never-ending story.

i. "Now unto him, who is able to work so as none can hinder, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, for ever and ever. Amen." (Poole)

(Act 28:2) The local inhabitants³ showed us extraordinary⁴ kindness, for they built a fire and welcomed us all because it had started to rain⁵ and was cold.

(Act 28:3) When Paul had gathered a bundle of brushwood⁶ and was putting it on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand.

(Act 28:4) When the local people⁷ saw the creature hanging from Paul's⁸ hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer! Although he has escaped from the sea, Justice herself⁹ has not allowed him to live!"¹⁰

(Act 28:5) However,¹¹ Paul¹² shook¹³ the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.

(Act 28:6) But they were expecting that he was going to swell up¹⁴ or suddenly drop dead. So after they had waited¹⁵ a long time and had seen¹⁶ nothing unusual happen¹⁷ to him, they changed their minds¹⁸ and said he was a god.¹⁹

(Act 28:7) Now in the region around that place²⁰ were fields belonging to the chief official²¹ of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us hospitably as guests for three days.

(Act 28:8) The father²² of Publius lay sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him²³ and after praying, placed²⁴ his hands on him and healed²⁵ him.

(Act 28:9) After this had happened, many of the people on the island who were sick²⁶ also came and were healed.²⁷

(Act 28:10) They also bestowed many honors,²⁸ and when we were preparing to sail,²⁹ they gave³⁰ us all the supplies we needed.³¹

(Act 28:11) ***Paul Finally Reaches Rome***

After three months we put out to sea³² in an Alexandrian ship that had wintered at the island and had the "Heavenly Twins"³³ as its figurehead.³⁴

(Act 28:12) We put in³⁵ at Syracuse³⁶ and stayed there three days.

(Act 28:13) From there we cast off³⁷ and arrived at Rhegium,³⁸ and after one day a south wind sprang up³⁹ and on the second day we came to Puteoli.⁴⁰

(Act 28:14) There⁴¹ we found⁴² some brothers⁴³ and were invited to stay with them seven days. And in this way we came to Rome.⁴⁴

(Act 28:15) The brothers from there,⁴⁵ when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius⁴⁶ and Three Taverns⁴⁷ to meet us. When he saw them,⁴⁸ Paul thanked God and took courage.

(Act 28:16) When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to live⁴⁹ by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

(Act 28:17) ***Paul Addresses the Jewish Community in Rome***

After three days⁵⁰ Paul⁵¹ called the local Jewish leaders⁵² together. When they had assembled, he said to them, "Brothers,⁵³

although I had done⁵⁴ nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors,⁵⁵ from Jerusalem⁵⁶ I was handed over as a prisoner to the Romans.⁵⁷

(Act 28:18) When⁵⁸ they had heard my case,⁵⁹ they wanted to release me,⁶⁰ because there was no basis for a death sentence⁶¹ against me.

(Act 28:19) But when the Jews objected,⁶² I was forced to appeal to Caesar⁶³ — not that I had some charge to bring⁶⁴ against my own people.⁶⁵

(Act 28:20) So for this reason I have asked to see you and speak with you, for I am bound with this chain because of the hope of Israel."⁶⁶

(Act 28:21) They replied,⁶⁷ "We have received no letters from Judea about you, nor have any of the brothers come from there⁶⁸ and reported or said anything bad about you.

(Act 28:22) But we would like to hear from you what you think, for regarding this sect we know⁶⁹ that people⁷⁰ everywhere speak against⁷¹ it."

(Act 28:23) They set⁷² a day to meet with him,⁷³ and they came to him where he was staying⁷⁴ in even greater numbers.⁷⁵ From morning until evening he explained things⁷⁶ to them,⁷⁷ testifying⁷⁸ about the kingdom of God⁷⁹ and trying to convince⁸⁰ them about Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets.

(Act 28:24) Some were convinced⁸¹ by what he said,⁸² but others refused⁸³ to believe.

(Act 28:25) So they began to leave,⁸⁴ unable to agree among themselves, after Paul made one last statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly to your ancestors⁸⁵ through the prophet Isaiah (Act 28:26) when he said,

' Go to this people and say,

***" You will keep on hearing, 86 but will never understand,
and you will keep on looking, 87 but will never perceive.***

(Act 28:27) ***For the heart of this people has become dull, 88***

***and their ears are hard of hearing, 89
and they have closed their eyes,
so that they would not see with their eyes
and hear with their ears***

and understand with their heart

and turn, 90 and I would heal them. " '91

(Act 28:28) "Therefore be advised⁹² that this salvation from God⁹³ has been sent to the Gentiles;⁹⁴ they⁹⁵ will listen!"⁹⁶

(Act 28:29) (*TEXT OMITTED*)

(Act 28:30) Paul⁹⁷ lived⁹⁸ there two whole years in his own rented quarters⁹⁹ and welcomed¹⁰⁰ all who came to him, (Act 28:31) proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ¹⁰¹ with complete boldness¹⁰² and without restriction.¹⁰³